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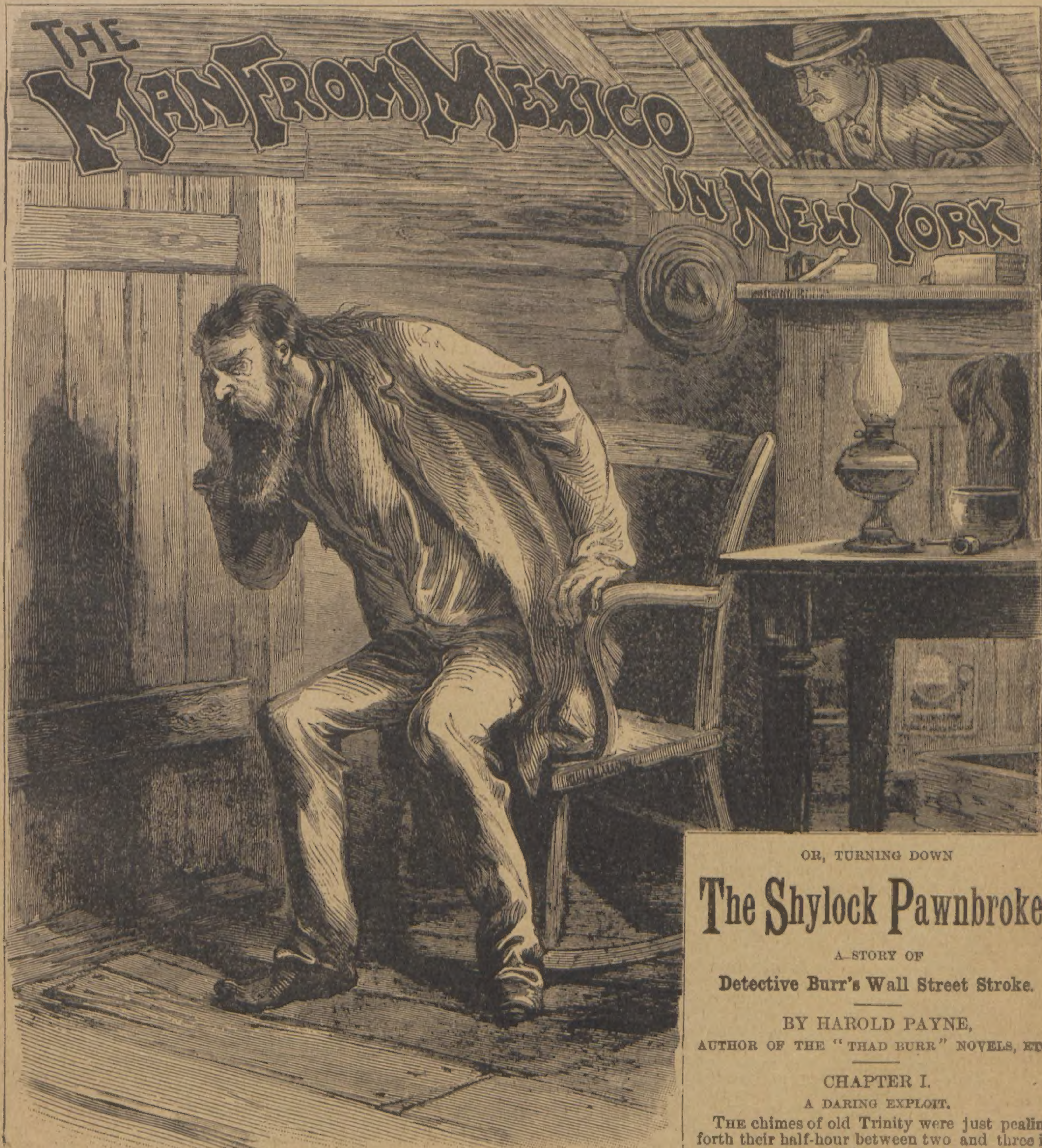
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OR, TURNING DOWN

The Shylock Pawnbroker

A STORY OF

Detective Burr's Wall Street Stroke.

BY HAROLD PAYNE,

AUTHOR OF THE "THAD BURR" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A DARING EXPLOIT.

The chimes of old Trinity were just pealing forth their half-hour between two and three in the afternoon, which rang along the quiet but busy home of wealth—Wall Street, and echoed and re-echoed among the tall buildings.

DETECTIVE BURR MOUNTED A ROCK AND PEEPED IN. THE OLD PAWNBROKER WAS LISTENING AT THE DOOR.

The Stock Exchange was just at its height of feverish excitement, and the clerks in the various banks were working might and main to close up the business of the day, when there emerged from one of the numerous brokers' offices a sturdy, strong-armed, roughly-dressed man, having the appearance of a porter, carrying in his hand a small valise, which appeared to contain something of considerable weight.

Following closely upon his heels were two other sturdy and solemn-looking chaps, each armed with a Winchester rifle.

The strange trio crossed the street and made their way in the direction of the United States Treasury Building.

They evidently had been in the habit of following this occupation regularly, for they went along as unconcerned as if the valise contained nothing more valuable than soiled linen.

Neither of the three deigned to turn his head from his course, or cast his eyes about for possible suspicious characters, and they had nearly reached the corner of William Street, within a short distance of their destination, when a closed carriage drove out of William Street and turned into Wall.

The vehicle was going at a leisurely gait, and the man with the valise paid no attention to it; but when it arrived nearly opposite the trio three other men came out of a doorway a few yards back, and started along the sidewalk in the same direction at a rapid pace.

Plainly dressed, they might have been taken for porters, though each wore a slouch hat, which was pulled down over his eyes.

As this trio neared the men with the valise they quickened their pace, and when within a dozen paces of the messenger and guard they started into a sharp run, each drawing a short sand-bag from beneath his coat as he ran, and each selecting his man among the trio with the valise, let drive with an unmerciful blow upon the head, felling the messenger and both guards to the ground.

The carriage had come to a stop.

Two of the thugs seized the valise from the grasp of the custodian, while the third, hastening to the carriage, threw the door open.

Into the carriage all three then leaped, the door was slammed shut, and the vehicle sped swiftly away.

The two guardians of the supposed treasure had quickly regained their senses and sprang to their feet in time to see the carriage speeding at a rapid rate in the direction of Broadway.

It was too late, however, to attempt to follow, so all there was for them was to return to the broker's office and report the loss, which resulted in the calling in of a policeman and the placing of the three unfortunate men under arrest.

The name of the broking firm was Spofford & Gamm, and consisted of Colonel Brunswick Spofford, a pompous, domineering big man, and Mr. Solomon Gamm, a fussy, conceited little man.

The two brokers were in their back room, quietly discussing their business prospects, when the three reported their loss.

Colonel Spofford sat on one side of a table with his head resting upon his hand, while little Gamm sat on the opposite side of the table with his feet elevated upon it, his head thrown back, smoking a cigar, while an amused smile played about his florid and somewhat oily features.

The colonel seemed to be in a rather serious mood, and was evidently deeply concerned over some matter; while little Gamm appeared to treat the subject, whatever it was, rather lightly, as if thoroughly confident of success.

Upon the announcement of the robbery by John Stivers, the porter, little Gamm brought his feet down off the table, opened his fishy little eyes to their fullest extent, and turned pale clean to the top of his bald head; while the austere colonel straightened up and stared at the unfortunate porter.

"How did this happen, sir?" he demanded, in his stentorian voice.

This, after the frightened man had gone over in detail the whole story of the robbery.

The demand entailed a repetition of the story, and at its conclusion the colonel roared again:

"I don't see how it could have happened. How did you ever permit such a thing to happen, Stivers?"

"I couldn't help it, sir," answered the now thoroughly terrified porter. "They just come on to me afore I knowed what was a-goin' to happen, an' done it, sir."

"Which amounts to criminal negligence," blustered the colonel; "criminal negligence. Eh, Gamm?"

The little man, having risen to his feet, was blustering about the room, puffing and blowing like a very small tug-boat in an ice-jam.

When appealed to by his partner, he turned abruptly, and answered in a shrill, piping little voice:

"Criminal negligence, sir! You are right, colonel. Criminal negligence is all you can call it. And now, sir," he went on, turning to the trembling porter, "what do you think ought to be done with you?"

"I—I—dun'no', sir," faltered the poor fellow. "I'm sure—"

"Sure of what, sir?" interrupted the colonel, bringing his fist down upon the table with a terrific bang. "Sure of what, sir? Sure that you ought to go to the penitentiary?"

"N—no, sir. I couldn't help—"

"No, of course you couldn't help it," broke in little Gamm, ferociously. "You never saw a criminal—a—a—neglectful criminal—in your life who could help what he did. He fires off a gun and kills somebody, and his excuse is that he didn't know it was loaded. The only thing to be done, sir," he continued, turning to his partner, "is to send for the police and have this guilty—negligently guilty—man and his colleagues locked up."

"Yes, that is all there is to be done," coincided his partner.

Here the colonel touched his electric bell, and when a boy appeared in response to it, he was sent away to summon a policeman.

An officer—or two of them, rather—soon arrived, and, in spite of the pleadings and protests of the unfortunate porter and his two guards, they were hustled off to prison.

When this part of the business had been attended to, Spofford and Gamm re-seated themselves, and the former gave expression to his satisfaction with what had been accomplished by a deep sigh.

"That is not a bad beginning," he observed, with a strange twinkle in his eyes as he looked across the table at his partner. "It will set the ball rolling, anyway."

"Yes, it will suffice to set the ball rolling," rejoined the little man, with unaccountable good humor, "and the next thing to be done, I suppose, is to notify the police."

"Yes, we must notify the police headquarters at once."

"And the newspapers?"

"They must get the whole story in time for the last issue this afternoon."

"All of which will go to show," observed Gamm, with a good-humored chuckle, "that the firm of Spofford & Gamm were not slow about moving in the matter."

"A most excellent trait in a firm—especially one of the high standing of ours."

With that the colonel touched his bell again, and when the messenger put in an appearance he was ordered to call another messenger, and the two were despatched forthwith, one to the police headquarters and the other to the various newspaper offices to announce the robbery.

It was not long thereafter, as may be supposed, before the back room of the brokerage firm was thronged with reporters, who, with busy pencils, were taking down the details of this bold robbery as they fell from the eager lips of the two heads of the firm.

"A most bold and audacious piece of business," asserted the colonel at frequent intervals, by way of emphasizing some piece of information he had just furnished. "It certainly looks as if our police were in league with the thugs."

"Have no policemen arrived to make inquiry?" asked one of the reporters.

"Not one. However, we have notified headquarters, and they will doubtless send some one down to look into matters very soon."

"What was the value of the contents of the valise?"

"It would be difficult to say, without reference to the books, but it will not fall far short of several hundred thousand dollars. Eh, Gamm?"

"Very little," responded the other.

"And you have no knowledge or suspicion of who the parties are?"

"Not the least. How could we? Even the porter and his guards are unable to identify the robbers, for the reason that they did not see them."

A few minutes later a detective arrived from headquarters, and as soon as the reporters had withdrawn, the two members of the firm were subjected to a second inquisition.

This detective was able to extract a few points which had been overlooked by the reporters, but hardly enough to work upon.

About the only thing worth mentioning was the fact that the bulk of the money contained in the bag belonged to customers.

"What proportion?" inquired the detective.

"Oh, I can hardly say," answered the colonel, evasively. "It will be necessary for us to examine the books before we can answer that question accurately."

"A considerable portion, however?" persisted the detective.

"Well, yes, I should say that—that—a considerable portion belonged to customers. But, of course, we shall have to make good whatever loss they may have sustained."

But the detective was still unsatisfied, and asked:

"It will be safe to say ninety per cent., I presume?"

"Oh, no, no, no, hardly that proportion, I should say."

"Seventy-five per cent.?"

"Oh, I hardly think—however, it would be impossible to estimate what the proportion is. We shall have it figured out by to-morrow, however, I have no doubt."

"Did the money belong to a great number of depositors or customers, with the amounts pretty equally distributed, or did it belong mostly to one or two?"

For some reason this question caused the colonel a good deal of agitation.

CHAPTER II.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS.

On the fifteenth of August, at about half-past two in the afternoon, and consequently about the same time at which the incident in Wall Street was passing, a young man sat alone in a modest room of a Brooklyn hotel.

The young man had barely passed his majority—that is, was between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-two, was tall, broad-shouldered and athletic of frame, light complexioned, good looking and good-natured.

From his easy, drawling manner of speech, his frankness and general loose-jointed appearance, it was evident he was from the West or South.

He sat there with his long legs sprawled out, gazing from the window at the dingy roofs spread out beneath his vision, and the river and great suspension bridge beyond, occasionally indulging in an impatient yawn and ever and anon consulting his watch.

"I don't see why he don't come," he would mutter, at intervals. "He was to have been here at two, and here it is half-past, and still he is not here."

The words had scarcely been spoken, when there was a rap at the door.

"Come in!" he called.

The door opened with a quick movement

and another young man walked into the room.

"Well, Hargrave," greeted the new-comer, "did you think I was never coming?"

"I began to think you were going to take your time about it, Madden," drawled the tall young fellow. "What news?"

"Everything is right."

"Good. You're sure about it?"

"Certainly. I have just come from the brokers."

"And the gold had arrived?"

"Yes, and had already been despatched to the safety deposit company's vaults."

"Glorious news! Now, let us get down to business."

Manton Hargrave squared himself at the little table, and, taking a package of papers from his pocket, spread them out before him.

His companion, Sylvester Madden, a medium-sized, dark, sedate man, several years the senior of Hargrave, seated himself on the opposite side of the table and promptly asked:

"What is your plan?"

"My plan is to invest a good share of this money in some paying business or speculation, and reserve the remainder for my own needs and whims."

"You propose to gratify your whims, then, do you?" asked the other, in a bitter tone.

"I certainly do—to the fullest extent. My life thus far has been humdrum enough, in all conscience, and now that I have this money, I propose to see a little of the sunny side of the world."

"Oh, well," interjected Madden, with a weary sigh, "that is your own affair, I reckon; and if you're going in for that sort of thing, there is no place like New York for gratifying whims—of all kinds. But what kind of business do you propose to invest your money in?"

"I have no more idea than the man in the moon. I shall have to look about, consult other business men, watch the papers advertising business advantages for sale, et cetera, and when something suitable turns up, then go in."

"And society?"

"Well, that I shall take in, too. My money will open the doors and I shall be the popular Mr. Manton Hargrave. Ha, ha!"

"Undoubtedly—with your money; that is the password here; worth, merit, nothing; money, everything."

As he spoke there came a rap at the door.

"That is Israel, I'll bet!"

"Come in!" called Hargrave.

The door opened and in stepped a queer-looking little man—a fair specimen of the German Jew—short, thick set, with a round head, which he kept continually rolling from side to side, a short neck and a flat, greasy face.

"How are you, shendlemens?" he greeted, rubbing his fat, dirty hands and grinning. "Bad peesness, d'ot, in Vall Street, aind't it? Big egsitement d'ere, you bet!"

Hargrave jumped to his feet.

"What is it?" he demanded, interestedly.

Madden arose also and repeated the question, but in a tone of indifference.

"Didn't you heard 'bout it, Hargrave?" inquired the Jew.

"Certainly not. What is it? Anything that concerns me?"

"Vell, d'at I cannot dell."

"Where did the robbery occur—at what bank?" demanded the young man.

"It wasn't a bank, mine friend," grinned the Jew, with exasperating dalliance. "It dook blace in der street."

"How did it happen?"

The Jew described the scene of the robbery.

"Idt vas a bold piece of peesness," he said, in conclusion. "And to tink whose monish it vas."

"Whose was it, Israel?" questioned Madden, carelessly.

"It vas from der prokerage office of Spofford und Gamm."

"Great Heaven!" and, turning to Madden, he asked:

"Didn't you say that you had just come from Spofford & Gamm's, Sylvester?"

"Yes," replied the latter, coolly.

"And you heard nothing of this affair?"

"No; it has probably occurred since I left."

"But you said that my gold had arrived at the office and had been sent to the safe deposit company's vault."

"Certainly, and the messengers who carried it were probably robbed on the way."

Hargrave sank in his seat beside the table, buried his face in his hands and groaned.

"Still it might not have been your money. It might be as well to find out from the firm whether it really was or not, before giving up to despair."

Hargrave arose to his feet again.

"You are right, my friend; you always look on the bright side. I wish I could. I shall take your advice and go over at once."

"I'm afraid you'll be too late, mine friend," put in the Israelite, consulting his watch. "The office, you know, closes at three."

"Still, on account of the robbery they may keep open a little later," suggested Madden. "You may still be in time to see the brokers."

Hargrave grabbed his hat and started for the door.

"Will you accompany me, Syl?" he asked.

"Sorry, Manton," answered Madden, "but I have some matters to talk over with Murdoch here. I shall wait here for you until you come back."

Hargrave said no more and hurried away.

"He seems to be somewhat excited over it," commented Murdoch, with a chuckle, as soon as the door was closed.

"Yes, he takes it a little hard," rejoined Madden, putting his feet upon the table, and puffing at his cigar, "but that is only natural. The poor devil has had a pretty tough time of it all his life, and now, just as he thought he was out of the slough, through falling heir to all this gold, to have it suddenly snatched away is enough to make anybody lose his nerve."

The Israelite gave vent to a low chuckle, as if some reflection was exceedingly pleasing to him.

"I wonder," he at last broke forth, "v'at d'ot Gamm vill say to him v'en he sees him?"

"I can easily imagine what he will say," answered Madden, with a little laugh. "He will condole with the poor fellow, tell him it is the common lot of man, and finish by wishing him better luck in the future."

Murdoch laughed merrily at this piece of humor, as he took it, and finally said:

"Yes, yes, d'ot ish oexactly v'ot d'ot Gamm vill say—yoost oexactly. Und old Spofford, v'at vill he say?"

"Oh, he will wag that old nut of his, frown and rub his hands and say: 'Too bad, too bad! Very sorry, young man. Can't be helped, though. Expect such things in the course of business. Too bad.' And then he may give him a bit of advice as to his future conduct."

"Yes, yes, d'ot vas old Spofford ofer again," again laughed the Jew. "But v'at you d'inks—he vill efer be able to drace der roppery to der right source?"

Madden indulged in a loud peal of laughter, and then said:

"You've heard of the needle in the haystack, Israel?"

"Yaw, der neetle in der hackstand—"

"No, the needle in the haystack."

"Yaw, vell, it vas all der same. You find not many neetles by d'em hackstands, but you get stuck all der same by d'em hackmen."

While the two worthies were thus making merry at his expense, poor Hargrave was making his way with all possible expedition to Wall Street, and to the brokerage office of Spofford & Gamm.

He arrived at the door of the office about half-past three—only to find it closed, as Madden had predicted.

The young man was so overcome by this disappointment, coming on the heels of his half-hour's strain of apprehension, that he was unable to stand, and sank down upon the marble steps of the palatial establishment, buried his face in his hands and wept like a child.

A vague hope had sustained and buoyed him, in spite of his cruel anticipation, up to that moment, but the finding of the door closed seemed to confirm his worst fears.

For a long time he sat thus, oblivious to the world beyond and to what was going on about him.

Indeed, there was very little going on about him, as the great financial street had become entirely deserted by this time. An occasional pedestrian, whose course took him through this way or the solitary policeman patrolling his beat, were the only human beings to be seen, at this time of day, and even they came and went without the knowledge of the wretched young man.

At length the chimes in old Trinity rang out the hour of four, and Hargrave raised his eyes in the direction without knowing why he did so. The pleasing notes had broken the deathly quiet of the street and interrupted the chain of his gloomy reverie.

For a minute or two he sat gazing up absently at the face of the great clock at the head of the street.

At length he became conscious that a man was standing on the opposite side of the street with his eyes fixed intently upon him.

Hargrave could not but feel that the man had been there for some time past, and that he had some motive, good or bad, in watching him (Hargrave).

He grew nervous under the vigil, moved uneasily about for a moment or two, and then, unable to endure the ordeal any longer, arose to his feet, descended the steps to the street and started off in the direction of Broadway.

He had taken but a few steps in this direction, however, when he noticed that the stranger was crossing the street in such a way as to head him off.

CHAPTER III.

A FORTUNATE ACQUAINTANCE.

As soon as he had satisfied himself that the man had him in view in crossing the street, Hargrave quickened his pace, looked in another direction and pushed on, with a view to passing the stranger without interruption.

He had not the least idea what the man would want with him, but in his present frame of mind he had no desire to make his acquaintance.

But his efforts were futile.

The moment Hargrave increased his speed the stranger did likewise, and by the time the latter reached the sidewalk he was alongside of the young man.

Even then Hargrave had a mind to pass him without notice, but to his surprise and chagrin the persistent stranger planted himself squarely in front of the young man, smiled blandly, and said:

"Pardon me, sir, but may I have a word with you?"

When the stranger began to speak, Hargrave's rage rose to the highest pitch, for he considered the action a piece of unwarranted impertinence after his obvious attempt to snub the fellow; but there was something in the voice and manner of the stranger that mollified his feelings as if by magic, and instead of answering with the angry retort he had contemplated, he held his peace and made no reply at all.

The stranger, still smiling affably, waited a moment for an answer to his question, and, receiving none, continued:

"I hope you will consider it no impertinence if I ask you, sir, if you are not in some way interested in the affair of the robbery which occurred this afternoon."

"I may or may not be," returned Hargrave, shortly. "In any case, what is that to you?"

"Nothing. Only from your actions I judged that the loss might have affected you to some extent, although I am aware that you are not an employee of the estab-

ishment, and that you have only been doing business with the firm a very short time."

Hargrave looked at the stranger in astonishment.

Who could this be, he thought, that he should possess all this information, which he supposed nobody in New York knew anything about?

And as he surveyed the stranger's face, encountered the frank, open expression, the kindly smile, and the searching, though friendly eyes, he was inspired, in spite of his perverseness, with a feeling of confidence in the man.

But before he had made up his mind how he should answer the question, the stranger went on:

"Am I right in my hypothesis?"

"You are—I am afraid. At least, it seems—"

"I know," interrupted the other, "your money, or gold bars rather, arrived from the West this afternoon, consigned to the care of Spofford & Gamm, who forthwith despatched it to the safety vault company, which destination it never reached."

Hargrave was more astonished than ever. After another steady stare at the remarkable stranger he asked:

"How came you to know so much about this business? You appear to know as much about my own business as I do myself."

The stranger laughed softly.

"That would not be a surprising fact. I generally know more about some people's business than they do themselves."

Hargrave studied the man's face for some moments, and every moment increased his wonder at and involuntary admiration for him.

At length he said, half-doubtfully:

"You are a detective, are you not? Although you are not what my notion of a detective, as I have learned to regard them, has always been."

"You expected to see a creature with horns, I have no doubt," rejoined the other, laughing.

"Not that, exactly, but I expected to see a person with a good deal of slyness and all that sort of thing, while you do not appear to have anything of that kind about you at all. You are a detective, though, aren't you?"

"Perhaps. But let us go somewhere where there will be no danger of interruption; I want to talk to you."

The two men walked along toward Broadway, and when that thoroughfare was reached, the detective hailed a cab and the two got in.

They had driven but a little way when the detective asked:

"Perhaps it will be better to go to your lodgings. Where do you stop?"

"At a hotel in Brooklyn."

"Well, suppose we go there?"

"Very well, if you like."

The detective gave the order to the cabman and the vehicle was turned about, entered Wall Street again, and drove down that street to the ferry.

"Are you alone over there?" inquired the detective.

"No, sir; I have a room-mate."

"Ah, yes. What sort of a fellow is he?"

"A very nice fellow."

"Have you known him long?"

"No; I got acquainted with him on the train from the West."

"How came you to get over here in Brooklyn?"

"It was through Madden, my room-mate. He was acquainted at the hotel, and persuaded me to go there. You see, he is an old New Yorker, while this is my first trip."

"Was this room-mate of yours acquainted with your affairs?"

"Yes; I have made a confidant of him almost from the hour of our getting acquainted."

"You believed, in doing so, that you could trust him, did you?"

"Yes. He is a man whom anybody would freely trust, I think."

"Possibly. Did any one else know about this matter?"

"Only one person."

"Who was that?"

"A friend of my room-mate's."

"What is his name?"

"Israel Murdoch."

The detective gave vent to a low whistle.

"An Israelite, eh?"

"Yes," replied Hargrave, coloring a little.

"What about him?"

"I know very little about him. In fact, I never met him until my friend brought him up into my room a few days ago."

"Do your room-mate and he appear to be on very intimate terms?"

"They appear to be very good friends."

There was a short silence, and then the detective resumed:

"Are we likely to find your room-mate alone?"

Hargrave colored again, and grew a trifle confused, for some unaccountable reason, but finally answered:

"No, I think not, sir."

"You think it likely that the Jew will be with him, do you?"

"I expect to find him there. He was there when I came away about an hour ago."

The cab had by this time arrived at the hotel, and the two men alighted.

For some reason, Hargrave was silent, pale, and appeared to be trembling with excitement as they entered the hotel and went up in the elevator.

When they stepped out of the elevator and started for the young man's room, the detective stopped him and said:

"Now, remember, whoever is in the room, I am not to be known as a detective."

"I understand."

"Introduce me as—well, as your friend Ferguson."

"Ferguson goes," laughed Hargrave. "By the way, he will know as much about who you are even then as I do."

"Never mind. Ferguson is a good name. Call me that for the present."

In another moment they arrived at the room door, and Hargrave unceremoniously turned the knob and opened it.

He stepped in first, and before the detective had got inside he heard some one within say:

"Hullo, Hargrave! Vas you pack already? Dit you findt der prokers in—vas?"

Hargrave did not answer at once, and the next instant the detective appeared before them, and the young man said:

"Gentlemen, this is a friend of mine, Mr. Ferguson."

Madden, who still sat at the table in pretty much the same position as when Hargrave left him, and the Jew, who also sat near the table, both bowed, while the Jew stole a sly glance at Madden and winked significantly.

"Ferguson was a fery oncommon name," observed Mr. Murdoch, with one of his characteristic chuckles. "I don't d'ink I vas efer heard d'at name before."

"Be seated, Mr. Ferguson," interposed Hargrave, ignoring the Jew's alleged joke. "Mr. Ferguson is a very old friend of mine, and has volunteered to help me ferret out the mystery of this robbery."

"Oh, d'ere vas a roppery, d'en?" put in the Jew.

"So it seems."

"And your monish vas also gone, mein freindt Hargrave?"

"I'm very much afraid so."

"Oh, mine cracious! D'at vas too pat!"

"Did you find the brokers in when you got over?" questioned Madden, speaking for the first time.

"No. As Murdoch prophesied, they were gone."

"I doldt you d'ey would be gone," interjected Murdoch.

"How did you hear of the robbery?" asked the detective, addressing Hargrave.

"This gentleman," he answered, indicating the Jew, "brought the news."

"How did you learn it?" pursued Ferguson, turning to the Jew.

"How I learn 'bout d'ot roppery?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I vas d'ere, mein freindt."

"When the robbery took place?"

"No, mein freindt, not v'en der roppery vas dook blace, but purty quivick after d'ot roppery vas gommittet."

"Yes. But where did you learn of the circumstance, and of whom did you hear it?"

"Oh, I vas by Vall Street, already."

"I understand; but who told you that a robbery had been committed—the brokers, a policeman, or who?"

"Oh, der boliceman vas toldt me d'ot."

"Did you learn any of the particulars?"

"No; only d'at d'ere vas a roppery, und d'at der monish vas vrom Spoffort und Gamm's."

"You did not go to the brokers' office to ascertain the particulars?"

"Nein; d'ot vas not mein peesness."

"What did you do, then?"

"I gome right avay quivick ofer here und dolt mein friend Hargrave all aboutt it."

The detective turned again to Hargrave and said:

"I think I had better have a word with you in private."

"Very well," assented the young man, glancing toward his friends. "I guess you gentlemen won't mind taking a walk for a few minutes while I have a talk with Mr. Ferguson?"

"Zertingly not," answered the Jew, rising promptly.

Madden also arose, but somewhat sullenly and without a word, and the two left the room.

The detective arose and fastened the door as soon as they had departed, and, having satisfied himself that they were not listening near the door, resumed his seat, and began:

"My young friend, I'm afraid you have made a mistake in reposing confidence in either of these fellows."

"Do you really think so?" cried Hargrave.

"The Jew in particular. I may be mistaken, but I believe I have seen him before, and if I am not very much mistaken his name is not what you think it is. My opinion is that they are a pair of crooks, and I shall be surprised if we have to go much further for the authors of the robbery."

CHAPTER IV.

A GRAVE SUSPICION.

Hargrave was both startled and dismayed by this unexpected announcement. Trusting and unsuspecting by nature, it had never occurred to him that his friend Madden was anything but what he seemed—an honest man.

He had never particularly fancied the Israelite, but had tolerated him because he was the friend of his friend.

But after pondering on the detective's words for some moments, a new idea came to him, for he exclaimed:

"No; you're wrong. Neither of these men could have been implicated in this affair."

"How so?"

"From all we can learn the robbery must have taken place some time between two and three."

"About half-past two," corrected the detective.

"Exactly at half-past two?"

"Within a minute of it, at most."

Hargrave's face brightened still more.

"In that case I know that my friend Madden could have had nothing to do with it."

"Why?"

"He arrived here at exactly half-past two."

A perplexed expression passed over the detective's features.

In a moment his face brightened up again as he asked:

"And the Jew?"

"He came about ten minutes later."

Again the detective was silent, rested his head on his hand, with his elbow on the table, and seemed to be plunged in deep reflection.

Suddenly he raised his head, took out his watch, studied the face of it for a full minute, and then said, in a musing tone:

"Half-past two. How are you so sure about the time of the arrival of your friend?"

"He was to have been here by two, as we had an engagement at that hour. As he did not arrive at the appointed time, I naturally grew impatient and began to consult my watch, as a man will do under such circumstances, and from that on every few minutes I would look at my watch. At length I remember distinctly looking at my watch, and seeing that it was half-past two, and realizing that we would be too late to fulfill our engagement, which was an important one, I felt somewhat angered at my friend. And then, just as I was in the act of putting up my watch, he arrived."

"And you think it was not more than ten minutes later when the Jew arrived?"

"I do not believe it could be more than that, although it might be fifteen."

"Yes."

And then the detective relapsed into silence again and resumed the study of his watch's face.

At length he looked up and inquired, in a tone of half-indifference:

"What time have you now?"

Hargrave took out his watch, and after glancing at it, replied:

"Just five."

"Ten minutes slow," mused the detective.

And he put away his watch with a satisfied expression, and, taking out a notebook, jotted something down.

When this was done, and he had returned the notebook to his pocket, he resumed:

"Now let me ask you a few questions, Mr. Hargrave."

"Yes, sir," responded the young man.

"I have learned enough regarding your antecedents to know that you had only recently arrived in town, and that you came from somewhere in the West or South. Kindly tell me what particular section you hail from, how you came in possession of this money, and all about it."

"There is not much to tell," began the young man, after a little reflection. "I was born and brought up in Davis County, Kentucky. My father was very poor, but managed to give me a pretty fair education. About five years ago—that is to say, when I was between sixteen and seventeen—an uncle, my father's brother, who owned a large gold and silver mine in Mexico, wrote to my father requesting him to let me come out and visit him, at the same time sending money to defray my expenses."

"I was just out of school, and had nothing to employ my time, so my father was only too glad of the opportunity of sending me away, believing that my uncle's intention was to do something for me."

"I found that my uncle was very rich, had an immense business, and his desire was to make me his assistant superintendent, provided I was the sort of boy he could rely upon. Well, in a short time we became greatly attached to each other—my uncle was a bachelor, with no one depending on him—and in a little while he came to look upon me as about as much of a proprietor as himself, and the men did the same."

"Everything went well up to six months ago, when one day my uncle had an altercation with another man, which ended in a fight. Both men used their revolvers, and my uncle got the worst of it."

"It was a terrible source of grief to me, the loss of my uncle, for I had come to regard him with a greater amount of affection even than I had ever done my own father. So I buried him with all the pomp the rude civilization of that part of the country would permit, and I then got a lawyer to look into my uncle's affairs, and it was discovered that he had left a will bequeathing all his wealth to me."

"I no longer had any desire to remain in that wild country, and, as I was a little past my majority and as rich as a Jew, I decided to sell out my possessions, come East and enjoy a little life."

"I had heard a good deal about the thieves which swarm the streets of New York, so I took the advice of a friend, who

was also a lawyer, and sent the gold to the care of the brokerage firm of Spofford & Gamm, of Wall Street."

"I then followed myself and arrived at this hotel three days ago. The gold only arrived to-day."

"Was it in coin or bullion?"

"Partly in coin and partly in bars."

"Was there anything about any of it by which you could identify it?"

"Not the coin. The bars are all marked with my uncle's smelting stamp, 'H. H.', which were his initials, his name being Henry Hargrave."

The detective again had recourse to his notebook, after which he resumed his catechizing:

"You were recommended to this firm, Spofford & Gamm, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were you well acquainted with the person who recommended them?"

"Tolerably so—as well as one man can be expected to know another in that country. You know that people are coming and going—"

"You had no reason to suspect that the person in question was not strictly honorable, had you?"

"None in the least."

"Nor, on the other hand, had any very substantial evidence that he was all right?"

"Well, no. You see, as I was about to say, the population of that part of the country is exceedingly cosmopolitan; no man has a past history so far as his neighbor knows or cares, so we've got to take a man pretty much for what we find him. If he turns out square, so much the better; if not, and he does you dirt, why, there's your six-shooter."

"If he doesn't use his first."

"Oh, yes; you've got to take your chances on that."

"How long had you known this man who recommended Spofford & Gamm?"

"About a year, I think."

"Which is a pretty long acquaintance out there, I presume?"

"Yes, if a fellow hangs about camp for a year without showing the coyote skin or getting himself lynched, he generally passes for fairly clean metal."

"You say he was a lawyer?"

"Yes. That is, that had been his profession, so he told me, and his conversation proved it, but when I first knew him he was rolling a quartz barrow. He afterward started a tarantula joint."

"A what?"

"Well, you call it a gin-mill here, I believe."

"A saloon, eh?"

"That's it."

"And still you were willing to take his advice with regard to the custodians of your fortune?"

"Oh, well, the fact of his keeping a shebang didn't affect his social standing out there. In fact, the saloon-keeper is a shining light in the society of Belcher Canyon, where I came from."

"What was the fellow's name?"

"Billy, or William, Ferguson. At least, that was the name he was known by out there."

The detective could not suppress a smile at the coincidence of the fellow having assumed (if, indeed, the name was assumed) the same name that he himself had taken for the occasion.

The Man from Mexico also laughed, and said:

"Funny that it should be the same as the one you gave me as your convenience handle."

"Yes, and he was probably just about as much entitled to it as I am to mine. Did the fellow ever tell you where he hailed from? He had originally come from the East, of course?"

"Yes, he told me he was from New York."

"As I expected. He was probably personally acquainted with this firm of brokers, then?"

"Yes, he told me that he had known them a long time, and that they had handled a great deal of money for him—when he was 'on his feet,' as he said."

"No doubt of it," responded the detec-

tive, with a dry laugh. "Now be good enough to give me a minute description of the man."

"Well, he was a short, thick-set man, with a red face and a bald head."

"How old a man would you take him to be?"

"Oh, I should say about forty, or thereabout."

"Do you think you would recognize him if you should see him again?"

"Recognize little Billy Ferguson? Well, I should say so. I'd recognize him anywhere."

The detective had business with his notebook for some time, and appeared to be filling up a number of pages with the information he had gleaned.

At length he closed the book, and went on:

"Now, about this man, Madden. Where did you first meet him?"

"On the train, as I said."

"But where did he get on? You did not come all the way from Mexico together, I take it?"

"On, no; he came into the car as the train was pulling out of Buffalo."

"And took a seat with you?"

"No, not at first. He took the next seat, and for a long time said nothing to anybody, and appeared to be asleep."

"Was this in the daytime or at night?"

"At night. The train left Buffalo at seven-something in the evening. As I say, he got into the next seat and had it all to himself, so after a little he curled up and seemed to be asleep. After a long time he straightened up, yawned, looked about him in a sleepy sort of way, and finally his eyes fell upon me."

"I don't know whether it was because he saw that I was wide awake and he desired to talk, or that he was really concerned in the matter, but after glancing carelessly at me and then about the car again, he took out his watch, looked at it, mumbled something impatiently, and finally looked across the back of the seat at me, smiled, and said:

"'Would you be kind enough to tell me what time it is? My confounded turnip's stopped?'"

"I consulted my watch and gave him the time, for which he thanked me politely, and then dropped into his former silence. After this had gone on for some time, however, he turned round again and said:

"'Denced trespone, this traveling at night without a sleeper, is it not?'"

"I admitted that it was, and was about to explain how it was that I had neglected to secure a sleeping-berth, when he shut me off with a deprecatory laugh, and said:

"'No explanations, my dear sir. I'm a man of the world and know how it is myself. We're all liable to get caught that way. Going to New York?'"

"I was piqued at his insinuation, for I knew that it referred to the state of my finances, and, having so recently become a millionaire, I was loth to be taken for a man who could not afford to ride in a sleeper, so, instead of answering his question as to my destination, I bluntly informed him that so far as the wherewithal was concerned, why, by the eternal jingo! I could buy the road, sleeping-cars and all. At which he smiled good-humoredly, and said:

"'Oh, certainly, certainly. I knew from your looks that you were a rich man. But old travelers will have their joke. Pardon the impertinence.'"

"There was something so engaging about the man that I freely forgave him, and we soon got into friendly conversation, during which I confided the fact of my large fortune, of which I was very proud, and also told him that I was coming to New York, and a good deal about my future intentions and prospects. Indeed, we soon got on such confidential terms that before we had reached the city we had come to an agreement to take these apartments together."

"Does the fellow appear to have any money?"

"Very little. He is hourly expecting some from somewhere, and I am supplying him temporarily."

CHAPTER V.

APPLYING THE PROBE.

The detective surveyed the young man for some minutes at the conclusion of his narrative, and seemed to study every lineament of his face, and to plunge into his innermost soul and study that.

At length he said, in a slow, deliberate manner:

"You will pardon me, Mr. Hargrave, but you are about the most confiding, unsuspecting—I was about to say gullible—young man I ever encountered. Did you never for a moment suspect that this fellow had some other motive than a strictly honorable one in prying into your private affairs, and of finally inducing you to take up your quarters in an out-of-the-way place like this, instead of going to a prominent hotel in New York?"

The Man from Mexico colored, dropped his eyes, and at length faltered:

"No, sir. You see, I am a stranger in the city and a stranger to Eastern ways, and he appeared to take such an interest in me and seemed to be so unselfish in his desire to assist me, that I think it possible that a man who had been about the world more than I have would have been taken in."

"Possibly. And possibly it will be a wholesome lesson for you; but I must say that it has been a dear one. Was all the wealth you possess in that consignment?"

"Nearly all. I have a few hundred dollars—enough to carry me along for a while in a modest way."

"But you have no property anywhere that you can fall back upon?"

"No, sir."

"You see, this investigation may prove expensive, and while I shall do all in my power toward recovering your money, there will be other expenses which must be met."

The young man's countenance fell.

The little hope which the appearance of the detective had inspired seemed to suddenly die out.

"Do you think there is no hope," he said in a despondent tone, "of ever recovering any of my wealth?"

"Oh, there is always hope. I never undertake a case without a certain amount of enthusiasm and boyish anticipation. Nevertheless, there is always a chance of failure with the best of us."

After a moment of silence Hargrave asked timidly:

"What will your fee be, sir, in case you work on the case?"

"My fee, my young friend, will be nothing—except in case of success."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" burst forth the Man from Mexico, jumping to his feet and grasping the detective's hand, while the tears rolled down his cheeks. "This is more than—"

"Never mind that now," interrupted the detective. "We shall talk of that when success crowns our efforts. At present, be good enough to call your room-mate. I wish to speak with him."

Hargrave was too much overcome with his emotions to attempt speech, and hurried out of the room in silence to obey the order.

As soon as left alone, the detective cast his eyes about the room, true to his instinct.

Slowly from his position in the center of the room he surveyed in turn every object in the apartment.

There was not much to examine. A few pieces of cheap furniture, such as is to be found in a cheap room of a modest hotel, a trunk, a well-worn carpet-bag, a few articles of wearing apparel scattered carelessly about, a few paper-covered novels and newspapers, and that was all.

And then his eyes descended to the floor.

A gaudy Brussels carpet, worn and faded in spots, and showing the stains of myriad articles spilt upon it by the legion of guests who had come and gone, covered the floor.

There were also a few cigarette stumps and burnt matches, and here and there an envelope or a fraction of a letter which had been torn up and tossed away.

And then, in the midst of all this con-

fusion, there did something appear to attract the skilled and unerring eyes which swept the carpet.

It was a small piece of brass—so small and insignificant that it would not have inspired a second glance from an ordinary person, and might even have escaped the detective's notice had not one end, which was bent up slightly and was brightly polished, probably from wear, caught a ray of the waning light that struggled in at the window, producing a yellow little glimmer there in the dun shadow.

The detective arose from his seat, walked across the floor and picked the article up, returned to his seat, and proceeded to examine it.

It did not take his experienced eye long to detect what the minute object's mission in the world had been before some ruthless hand had torn it from its associations. It had been the brass plate covering the lock of a valise.

There was no mistaking it. There were the keyhole and the two tiny holes for the screws at either end, and, what was still more important, the maker's name and address impressed in small letters with a die.

The name and address were:

JNO. C. SPALDING & CO.,
TRUNKS, VALISES AND TRAVELING
BAGS,
123D STREET, DENVER, COL.

Associating the innocent bit of brass in some mysterious way with the valise which had contained the gold stolen in Wall Street, the detective placed it in his pocketbook and put it into his pocket.

He had no more than completed the operation when the door opened and Hargrave entered—alone.

His appearance was downcast and discomfited, and the detective at once guessed the cause.

Nevertheless, as one is apt to do under such circumstances, he asked:

"Where is your friend?"

"I can't find him," replied the young man, despondently, sinking into a chair.

"He hasn't gone away for good? He will be back?"

The Man from Mexico shook his head dubiously.

"I'm afraid not, sir, after what you've said about him."

"But his baggage is still here," said the detective, casting his eyes in the direction of the carpet-bag in the corner.

"Yes, I know," rejoined Hargrave, with a bitter smile, "but there's nothing in that that would keep him here long, especially if he has got a share of my money."

"This is unfortunate," muttered the detective, rising. "I presume you have no idea where he makes his headquarters when not here?"

"No more than you have, sir. During all the time we have been together he has never given me so much as a hint of having any other home—whether he has another home or not—or whether he has any folks on the face of the earth."

"Discreet young man. It would have been as well for you if you had patterned after him in the matter of discretion."

"It would, indeed," moaned the other. "But I am not discreet. I'm a consummate idiot!"

The detective walked to the window and looked out over the dusky housetops, now quickly growing duskier than ever in the gathering shadows. But away out yonder, beyond where Manhattan Island pushes its pointed nose impudently into the bay, the setting sun was throwing up his pink and gold and orange shield of glory, and against it stood out sharp and black the towering buildings of the great city.

"What a mass of dark and unfathomable mystery those majestic domes and those gruesome shadows conceal!" he mused. "Ah, me. But I should not remain here. It is my place and duty to unravel some of the mystery."

And, turning abruptly from the window, he put out his hand to the young man.

"Well, I must leave you," he said, in a cheerful voice. "There is nothing to be learned here more than I have already

learned. I shall have to look in another direction. Before we part let me give you a bit of advice. First of all, leave this hotel. Go at once."

"To-night?"

"Yes, at once."

"Why is that, sir?"

"Don't be inquisitive," interposed the detective, with a show of impatience. "Do as I advise. Leave the hotel. Do not let any one know where you are going, and don't go far. Get a quiet boarding-house somewhere in the neighborhood, and pass under an assumed name for the present. Let them understand here that you are going back West, if you like—anything to prevent prying people from finding out where you are. You need not even give me your address, but I will give you mine, and as soon as you are situated come and see me at my house."

With that the detective handed him a card.

The Man from Mexico looked at the card and then asked:

"But about my mail—how am I to get that?"

"Oh, yes, I was about to give you directions with regard to your mail. Drop a postal card to the Brooklyn postmaster requesting your mail matter to be sent to my house and in my care. You can call there for it. You will probably be settled so that you can call upon me some time tomorrow forenoon. When you come—No, that won't do, either," he broke off suddenly. "I'll tell you what to do. Go at once and find a boarding-house, and represent that the room is for a friend. Then get your effects moved over, telling your new landlady that your friend will be along later in the night. Then come to see me, and I will disguise you so that your best friends won't recognize you, and you can go back and impersonate your friend. Do you think you can do this?"

"What is the object of all this, sir?"

"There goes your confounded inquisitiveness again," growled the detective. "Why cannot you follow my directions without asking the reason for everything?"

"Forgive me, sir," said the young man, meekly. "In future you shall have no reason for complaint."

"I hope not, for your sake. But you haven't answered my question. Do you think you can play your part in this matter?"

"Yes, sir, I believe I can."

"You must be sure of it. Failure on your part may bring failure upon the whole scheme."

"Well, then, sir, I feel quite confident that I can. I shall do my best, at any rate."

"Ah, that's the way to talk. Now I can confide in you. You see, when you are properly disguised so that you run no risk of being identified, you can go and come with impunity, and one of the duties which I shall impose on you will be to call regularly at this hotel, inquire for Merton Hargrave's mail, making a point to drop the hint occasionally that the gentleman in question has gone West, and then bring it about in some way to inquire whether Madden or the Jew has been here. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. I'm off. Stir about, my boy, and find a boarding-house. You won't have to go far. In almost any of these streets you will find plenty of them. Good-by. Remember all I have told you, and let me see you some time during the evening."

And, wringing the young man's hand, the detective vanished.

The Man from Mexico stood motionless for several minutes after the door had closed upon the detective, wondering, musing, speculating, and at last gave vent to his perplexity in audible soliloquy:

"That is the strangest being I ever met in the whole course of my life. I wonder who he is. I know he is a detective, but how the deuce came he to fall in my way? I wonder what this card says."

The dim light in the room had not enabled him to read the card thus far, and he did not like to incur the risk of another reprimand for inquisitiveness by either asking or going to the window to examine

it while the detective was present. And now when he went to the window he found the light had faded to such a degree that even there he could make out nothing. So he fumbled in his pocket for a match, and when one was found, struck it and held it close to the card:

And this is what he read:

THADDEUS BURR,
Secret Service,

— 34th St. New York.

The Man from Mexico pocketed the pasteboard and hurried out of the room and out of the hotel.

CHAPTER VI.

"LAYING THE PIPES."

Thad Burr reached home just in time for dinner, and, the meal disposed of, he retired to his study, leaving word that if a young man should call he was to be shown at once to the study.

Once within the secret recesses of his study, or "studio," as he facetiously called it, he produced his notebook and examined the data taken down thus far.

He next took out the bit of brass he had found on the carpet in Hargrave's room, examined it carefully, and murmured:

"Not such a bad start for an afternoon's work. If I do as well to-morrow the case will be pretty well under way. That insignificant piece of brass, simple as it seems, will, I suspect, lead to a clue."

A little after ten Hargrave arrived, out of breath and in a high state of perspiration.

"Why, old fellow," laughed Thad, "you look as if you had been exercising rather vigorously for a hot night."

"I've been on the jump every moment since I saw you," said the young man, sinking wearily into a chair.

"Well, what have you accomplished?"

"A good deal. Got the boarding-house for one thing, and got moved, for another."

"And reached here for another."

"And I also wrote and dropped a postal card to the postmaster, as you suggested."

"Good boy! Now, let us get to business. We haven't much time to waste, as you will have to be at your boarding-house before it gets too late, so we will have to talk fast."

"Oh, as to the boarding-house, I took the precaution to tell the landlady that my friend would probably not arrive before midnight, or possibly a little after."

"That was thoughtful. But now, look here," and producing the piece of brass, Thad held it before the young man's eyes.

"Did you ever see anything like that?" he asked.

Hargrave took the piece of brass, and as soon as he glanced at it exclaimed:

"Why, that is off my satchel. Where did you get it?"

"Never mind where I got it. Which satchel do you mean?"

"Why, the only one I had—the one the money and gold bars were sent in."

"Do you mean to say that the money and gold bars were sent all the way from New Mexico in a satchel?"

"So far as I know, they were. You see, we have strong canvas bags, made in the shape of a valise, and made for the purpose of carrying bullion. They are much more convenient to handle than a box and less liable to excite suspicion. I have seen miners lugging a wad of gold that would attract a thief a mile if he had known what it was, in a dirty old bullion-bag that didn't look worth picking up in the road."

"What was your bag like?"

"Just an ordinary bullion-bag, if you know what that is like."

"But I do not—exactly."

"Well, it does not differ very greatly from an ordinary valise, except that it is made of canvas a sixteenth of an inch thick—will glance a dirk-knife ordinarily—and is bound with iron more heavily than the common valise. Mine was about twelve inches long."

"What color?"

"It was originally a dingy white, but the last time I saw it it was the dingy without the white."

"Any name or mark?"

"Only my uncle's monogram, or initials, 'H. H.'"

"That is quite sufficient—if we succeed in finding it. The worst of a mark on an article of this kind is, that the clever rascals are too apt to destroy it the first thing. But I guess we are getting on pretty well. Now let me make you up so that you can get back. I sha'n't change your character very much, only alter your general appearance. A full beard will not be unbecoming to you, and yet change your appearance so much that not one person in a thousand would recognize you."

As the detective talked, he was busy adjusting the beard to the young man's face.

"There you are," he said, at last. "Take a look at yourself in the glass there. Do you think you would know yourself if you should meet yourself in the road?"

"I'll swear I wouldn't," laughed Hargrave, after taking a peep in the mirror. "And it does not look out of the way, either."

"No, there is the secret of successful making-up. Never put on anything that gives you an unnatural or grotesque appearance, for then you attract attention at once, and the moment you get some inquisitive chap to examining your get-up he is almost sure to discover some flaw that will betray you. There is where most detectives blunder. The average Central Office man will stick on a great bushy beard and a frowsy wig, and a pair of impossible spectacles, and then, pulling a slouch hat down over his eyes, and grasping a rough stick for a cane, go hobbling along under the happy delusion that he is disguised beyond recognition. Why, the crook that wouldn't 'smoke' them at a glance ought to be bored for the simples."

"But there is no question about your skill in this line," interposed Hargrave, taking another rather proud look at himself and stroking his false beard.

"A lifetime at a trade ought to insure some sort of proficiency. Now, let me touch up those eyebrows a little. There is no feature more important than the eyebrows. With a good healthy pair of eyebrows an expert shammer can give almost any sort of expression to the most conspicuous pair of eyes that ever twinkled. There, that's more like it. Now, for a few crow's-feet in the corners of the eyes, and a line or two by the side of the nose, to give you a few extra birthdays."

All this time the great artist-detective was busy with his brush, and he was evidently satisfied with his work, for after a few adroit strokes, he straightened up, drew a deep sigh of satisfaction, and exclaimed:

"Ah, there we are! At least ten years older without the expense of living all that time. Now, run along, and if anything turns up during the day, to-morrow drop round in the evening and let me know. If I am not here, come right in here and write a note and leave it. Good-night, old fellow. Success to you."

And before the young man could any more than return the good-night, the detective had hustled him out of the house.

The first thing that Thad did the following morning was to call at the Bradstreet Agency and make inquiry with regard to the standing of the brokerage firm of Spofford & Gamm.

He found that, although the firm was new, only having been in existence a few months, it was fairly rated, and seemed to be sound.

His next move was to call upon the firm themselves.

But as he was working on the case independently, without even the knowledge of the superintendent, and as he knew in reason that the superintendent already had men on the case, Burr decided to visit the firm in an assumed character and under a fictitious name.

This entailed the necessity of a disguise, as his face was pretty well known in Wall Street, so he returned home for this purpose.

He made himself up to resemble a Westerner of the modern type—that is,

without the long hair or broad-brimmed hat—but with a flowing mustache and "hoss-tail" whisker, and the general free-and-easy garb peculiar to the section from which he was supposed to hail.

Thus accoutered, he called upon the firm at a few minutes after eleven, sending in the name of Billings.

Mr. Gamm was out at the time, but Mr. Spofford received him in the back room with overwhelming politeness and unctious, evidently thinking he sighted a fat customer in the well-to-do Western man.

Thad was not slow to see how matters stood, which was exactly what he could have wished, and decided to carry out the ruse.

After informing the broker that he was from a certain small town in Mexico, where he had accumulated a great deal of wealth in the mining business, he slyly hinted that he would like to place a portion of it with some reliable broker who would invest the money in paying stocks or bonds.

"Well, sir," rejoined Spofford, rubbing his hands with eager anticipation, "you couldn't have come to a better place or at a luckier time. There's a big slump in phosphate stock—only temporary, mind you—but we can buy any amount of stock at thirty-two and a quarter. There's a fortune in it, sir, for anybody who has the ready cash to invest."

"Of course I have perfect confidence in your honor and judgment, from the recommendations I have had of you by people in our part of the country. So you think this a safe and profitable investment, do you, sir?"

"Couldn't be beaten in the market. In fact, I have seen nothing to equal it in years. But who was it in your part of the country that recommended us to you?"

"A gentleman by the name of William Ferguson."

"Ah, yes, Billy. I know him very well. Good fellow, Billy."

"Tip top," reiterated Thad.

"Generous to a fault."

"Give up his last nugget to a friend in need. By the way, if I am not mistaken, Billy recommended another party from our section to you recently."

Spofford knit his brows as if striving to recollect, and finally mused in an abstract manner.

"Let me see—from Mexico? There was a—"

"Hargrave was the man's name," interrupted the detective. "He was from Belcher Canyon, I believe."

"Oh, yes, yes, I recall him now," exclaimed Spofford, brightening up and smiling benignly. "I recall him, since you mention Belcher Canyon. Yes, he sent us quite a sum, but the affair was very unfortunate all round."

"Let's see. He was the man who was robbed, was he not?"

"Yes. That is, his money was among the other that was taken, poor fellow. It was most unfortunate. It nearly broke my heart when I realized it. I couldn't sleep a wink last night from worrying over it and thinking of the poor young man, with so bright a future before him, being suddenly rendered penniless by these miserable rogues."

Thad thought it rather queer that, if the affair had caused him all this grief and worry, he should have had so much difficulty in even recalling the circumstance of Hargrave having sent him the money. But he refrained from alluding to it, and said:

"Of course it was none of your fault that the robbery took place."

"Certainly not. How could it be? We sent the money to a safe deposit company pending an opportunity for investing it for the poor young man, and some unscrupulous rascals overpowered the porter and his guards and took the money."

"You say that there was some other money besides that belonging to Hargrave in the bag?"

"Oh, yes. The greater portion of it belonged to other investors and to ourselves; but my greatest grief is for the Mexican young man."

"Had this porter been in your employ long?"

"Yes, a great many years."

"And you have never had reason to question his honesty?"

"Never. Why, I never hesitated about giving him the keys to our vaults, when we were in the banking business, or entrusting him with any amount of money."

"Nevertheless, you have had him arrested, I see by the papers."

"Yes, poor creature, we have had him arrested," returned Spofford, with a sanctimonious whine. "That was regular, you know. I should have preferred not to have done it. He is an honest fellow, and has a family; but the transaction was regular. That sort of thing always follows in a case of this kind."

Then, by way of averting the broker's suspicion at his inquisitiveness, he switched off with:

"Do you think it possible that a similar fate might await my gold if it should be sent to you, sir?"

"Oh, no, no, not the least. You see, we have resolved upon a different method in the future."

"What is the new method, if I might be so inquisitive?"

"I am not prepared to reveal the secret just at present."

At that moment little Mr. Gamm stepped into the room.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNEXPECTED TURN.

Little Gamm stopped short on finding the stranger with his partner, and regarded Thad with undisguised suspicion.

Spofford may have guessed his partner's attitude, for he hastened to introduce the detective as a prospective customer, putting great stress on the fact of his having come from the same section of country that Hargrave had hailed from, and hinting that the new customer had a considerable sum to invest.

This had the effect of reassuring the little man to some extent, and he seated himself, in the attitude of a listener, rather than a participant in the conversation.

"Our friend feels a trifle nervous about investing his money," began Spofford, half to his partner and half to Thad, "after hearing of the casualty of yesterday."

Gamm bowed his head, and smiled patronizingly, but said nothing.

"I tell him," pursued Spofford, "that that accident might have occurred to the customer of any other house as well as our own, and that under the new system which we are about to adopt the thing could not possibly occur."

Gamm looked at his partner with a somewhat mystified expression, which seemed to indicate that he had not been properly coached, and finally made out to reply:

"That is true. Under the new system there will be no danger."

"Gentlemen," interposed Thad, "I presume it is none of my business what your new system is. I trust it is different from your old system, but until I am made acquainted with it I do not believe you can expect me to invest my money with you. Good-day."

As he concluded the sentence, the detective arose and started for the door.

"One moment, Mr. Billings," called Spofford. "I hope you won't be hasty. I think we can explain this matter satisfactorily to you. Can we not, Mr. Gamm?"

Gamm seemed no less mystified than before, but eked out a mechanical:

"Oh, certainly."

Thad returned with affected reluctance to his seat.

"Under the old system," began Spofford, "we trusted to the ordinary method of having bullion sent to us by Express, and, since giving up our own vaults, sending it to the safety deposit vaults by our own messengers. Now we purpose having our customers who live out of town ship their bullion direct to some responsible deposit company, which will not only relieve us of a great deal of responsibility, but prevent the possibility of such accidents as the one which occurred yesterday."

At the conclusion of the explanation, which had been delivered with obvious effort, Gamm's countenance underwent a radical change.

The expression of apprehension and distrust gave place to one of satisfaction and content.

It was evident that he had experienced some anxiety as to how his partner would come out with his "explanation."

"In this case, then," interposed Thad, "the responsibility will rest between the Express company and the deposit company."

"Certainly," answered Spofford.

Thad appeared to reflect a moment, and then said, at the same time rising again:

"So that there is really no need of my troubling you gentlemen with the affair at all. I shall make arrangements with some trustworthy deposit company, and ship my bullion direct to them."

With that he pretended to be about to walk out again, when Spofford called him back, and said, more confidentially this time:

"But don't you see that by doing that you not only lose the interest we should pay you for the money while it was in our possession, but you would have to pay storage on it while it remained with the deposit company?"

"That is true," said Thad, affecting to be nearly convinced. "I hadn't thought of that. Still, in this way, it would be perfectly safe."

"No more so than with us," insisted Spofford, "and then there is the advantage of having the money where we can get at it in case of an opportunity for investment where it must be had at short notice."

After a good deal more argument on the part of the broker, the alleged Mr. Billings finally affected to become persuaded, and said:

"Very well, gentlemen. You seem to be all right. I guess I'll risk a part of my money in your hands."

"A part?" exclaimed Spofford, in a tone of surprise. "Why not all of it?"

"Oh, I think it would be better to only risk a part to start with, and if that pans out all right, I'll send you the rest."

"About how much will you send us?"

"Oh, about two hundred thousand dollars," said Thad, carelessly.

Both the brokers opened their eyes very wide, and Spofford still further showed his surprise by asking:

"About how much have you altogether, Mr. Billings?"

Again the pretended capitalist affected great indifference with regard to his alleged wealth, and replied with a flippant air:

"Oh, a couple of millions, I guess."

This caused the two brokers to look more astonished than ever, and their treatment of Thad from that on was the next thing to idolatry.

They used all their arts to persuade him to venture a larger sum than he had agreed upon, but in this he was firm, and it was finally settled that he was to send them two hundred thousand dollars in gold.

As he was about passing out of the building little Gamm overtook him, touched him on the arm, and said:

"A word with you, Mr. Billings, if you please."

"What is it?" asked Thad, pausing.

"Do I understand that you are from the same part of the country as Hargrave?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Are you acquainted with him?"

"Slightly."

"You have met him?"

"I have."

"Have you seen him since coming to town?"

Thad was something at a loss as to how to answer this. He did not know what the result of telling him the truth would be, and he did not like to tell a deliberate falsehood. But he concluded finally that there could be nothing forfeited by telling the truth, and replied:

"Yes."

"Where?"

Thad now saw that he had made a mistake, for he would either have to equivocate

after all, or tell him a great deal more than he cared to do.

But he was not long in a quandary, and answered by asking:

"Are you not doing business with Mr. Hargrave?"

"Certainly."

"Then of course you know where he is stopping?"

"Yes, yes. Let me see. At the—the Astor House, if my memory serves me."

"That is right."

He found it necessary to stretch the truth a little after all.

"Ah, yes, the Astor House. How long does he expect to remain in the city?"

"I do not know, but until he either succeeds in finding his gold and securing the arrest of the robbers, or discovers that neither can be accomplished."

"I suppose so, poor fellow," said Mr. Gamm, with a sympathetic sigh. "I do hope and trust that the poor young man may succeed in his efforts; but he is going to find uphill work in the face of all the odds against him."

"You think there is little hope of success then?"

"Success is decidedly chimerical, Mr. Billings. You see these fellows are organized, thoroughly organized, and if we can believe half of what the papers tell us, they are in league with the police, so that success in a matter of this kind is often a question of money. If the young man had plenty of money to spend with the detectives, pay bonuses and the like, there might be some chance for him; but the poor fellow hasn't a penny. They have cleaned him out completely."

"Indeed?"

"It is true, I am sorry to say."

"If that is the case it was a wise resolution on my part when I decided not to send you all of my money."

"Oh, not at all, my friend," the broker hastened to say. "Under the old system it might have been, but under the new, it would be perfectly safe for you to send every dollar you possess. In fact, it would be the best thing you could do."

"Possibly—for some reasons. But I am very glad now that I did not decide to do so."

"How is that?"

"As you say my friend Hargrave cannot hope for success without money, so I must furnish him money."

"Tut, tut, my young friend," remonstrated the little broker. "I should do nothing of the kind. What you could afford to furnish him would do him no good, and if you furnish him enough to insure success it will seriously involve you. The best way is to stop before you begin in a case of this kind."

"Oh, as to the amount," said Thad, sneeringly, "I care nothing for that. If what little I have will insure his success he is welcome to it."

"Great Heavens! This is recklessness, my friend; downright recklessness. Where do you expect to realize your recompense in such a wild investment?"

"In the satisfaction of seeing the scoundrels who planned and perpetrated this outrage brought to justice!"

Gamm laughed indulgently, poked the pretended countryman with his finger, and said:

"Ah, but you wouldn't do anything so foolish as that? I'm sure you are too sensible a man for that," coaxed the little broker.

Thad turned and looked the little man straight in the eye for a moment, and then said, in a slow, deliberate tone:

"Don't for the world flatter yourself with the delusion that I won't, Mr. Gamm, for I will."

So saying, the detective turned upon his heel and strode away, leaving the astonished broker to stand staring after him with open eyes and mouth.

Thad had not thus far considered it worth his while to visit the various pawnshops and thieves' fences with which he was acquainted, for the purpose of ascertaining whether the gold bars had been pledged or not, as he knew, for one thing, that the class of crooks he was looking

for were in no hurry about placing their ill-gotten gains, and for another that the police were attending or pretending to attend to this part of the business. But as he had got so far along with the other details of the case, he decided to start upon this mission that same afternoon.

Leaving the pawn-shops for a future occasion, he began operations by paying a visit to a fence known to a very few besides himself and the crooks themselves.

The place was situated on one of the yet unimproved cross streets converging into the Boulevard at the extreme upper end of the city.

The house, or shanty, was one of the tumble-down old rookeries allowed to stand in these still wild and desolate spots, and was perched away up among the rocks several feet above the street, and reached only by a flight of rickety wooden steps which stood almost perpendicular against the face of the rugged cliff.

The yard surrounding the wretched hut was filled with all manner of cheap plunder, such as old iron, barrels, boxes, worn-out wagon-wheels and the like, which the occupant of the place collected for no other purpose than as a blind, to keep up the delusion that he was a respectable junk-dealer and pawnbroker.

Burr had made himself up to impersonate one of the East Side crooks of the toughest type, and, as he had made frequent visits to the place before, and knew the inmate's habit of pretending to be out when visitors called, Thad stepped to the end of the shanty, mounted a rock that stood there, and peeped in. An old Jew was listening at the door, so Thad hurried round and knocked.

Nor did he knock as one uninitiated into the mysteries of the fraternity would have knocked, as a proof of which a very short interval intervened between his summons and the opening of the door, and the sole and only occupant, the old Jew, stood before him.

"Good-afternoon, Uncle Isaac," said the detective, extending his hand to the Jew. "How are you to-day?"

CHAPTER VIII. THE FIRST CLEW.

The old Jew shaded his eyes with his hand and peered at the new-comer with an expression of uncertainty, and finally mumbled:

"I don't know you. Who you vas?"

"Oh, yes, yer do, Uncle Isaac," laughed the detective. "Yer needn't say yer've fergot Molly the Shad?"

After another long stare, the Jew shook his head doubtfully.

"You vasn't Molly der Shat, is it?" he muttered.

"Say, Ikey, old boss, w'ot's de matter w'd yer peepers? Yer must 'a' b'in a-doin' business w'd d'e ash bar'l an' got ye'r old skylights dusted. W'y, o' course I'm Molly the Shad, on'y I've shaved me sluggers since yer seen me las', see?"

"Oh, das vas der matter, vas it?" chuckled the old man. "Vell, come inside, Molly. V'at I gan do for you?"

Old Isaac Blottstein was a typical specimen of his race, particularly that portion of it that makes its living by trafficking in the ill-gotten goods of the thieves of New York and other large cities.

He was bent and shriveled, his nose was particularly long and twisted, and looked as if it might have been used as a corkscrew with which he had pried into other people's affairs all his life; his features were pinched and sharp, his eyes, which were heavily shadowed by shaggy brows, were small, keen and alert, his beard exceedingly long, grizzled and unkempt, and the whole aspect of the man was crafty, cunning and unscrupulous.

He ushered his guest into his wretched abode, which was choked with confused heaps of all manner of plunder, and, after closing the door, resumed:

"Vell, Mollie, v'as is it old Ikey could do for you?"

Thad cast his eyes about the place as a pretended precaution that he was not to be overheard by any unwarranted listen-

er, and finally said, in a confidential undertone:

"See here, Ikey, d'is business is on de dead. See? An' I don't want no smell-ers. See?"

"So helup me, Moshes, d'ere vas no poty apout der blace but us two."

"Dead shure?"

"Oh, I hope I may nefer bread' anudder bread', if d'ot vasn't so, mein friendt."

"All right, Ikey, I s'pose I'll have ter take ye'r word fer't, but if yer deceives me, look out fer ye'rself. See? De game is d'is, Ikey."

Here the pretended crook paused and again cast his eyes suspiciously about. And then, appearing to be satisfied, went on:

"De game is jes' d'is. See? D'ere's b'in a job down in Wall Street—s'pose yer heered on't?"

The Jew nodded, grinned and rubbed his hands with satisfaction.

"Wal, I dun'no' w'edder yer knowed it or not, but me an' me pal, Sheeney Mose, was inter de game."

The Jew opened his eyes a little and exclaimed:

"Ish d'ot so?"

"D'at's right, Ikey. I'm givin' yer straight goods, see?"

"D'os ish strange," mused the old man. "Moshes vas here lasht night, und he sait nutting about it."

"Oh, d'at don't count," sneered the pretended tough. "Mose is dead sly, he is. He ain't t'rowin' his liver ter every dog d'at growls at 'im, an' mebbey he wouldn't t'ank your'n trooly 'cause I pipped de game ter youse; but d'at's all right. I know youse fer a clost shell w'ot can't be picked open w'd a gold jimmy, so heer goes. Me an' Mose was inter de bulge, an' d'at's right. An' now w'ot I was goin' ter tickle yer w'd is jes' d'is. See? D'e gang w'ot we done d'e bulge fer has buttoned up—won't sweat. See?"

"Vell, d'at vas your own fault, mein friendt. Der birt v'at pulite a nest for another birt shenerally roosts on a pare limb."

"D'at's all right, but yours trooly don't perpose ter roost on no bare limb—not if der court knows itself, an' I t'ink she does. Now, w'ot I'm comin' at is d'is. See? D'e gang fetched d'e swag ter youse fer deposit, an'—"

"V'as ish dot?"

"I reckon yer piped me, Ikey," sneered the alleged tough. "Yer needn't tell me ye'r lugs is plugged, ef ye'r skylights is shattered. Yer smoked me all right. See? I said d'e gang brought d'e swag ter youse. Ain't d'at right?"

"Nein, nein, mein friendt," protested the Jew, rubbing his hands and grinning.

"Der gang don't vas dealt mit' me any more. I shvere to d'ot, mein friendt."

"Oh, d'at don't count a little bit, Ikey. See? I'd rudder take er check wrote on ice in hot we'dder d'an your oat'. I said d'ey brought d'e swag ter youse, an' d'at goes."

"Oh, mein friendt, how can you say such d'ings?" whined the Jew, "v'en you know I wouldn't deceive you for der world?"

"I'm dead shure yer wouldn't fer der world, 'cause yer'd be afeerd yer'd haf' to pay d'e taxes onto it, but yer'd do it blamed quick fer a wad, an' don't youse never fergit it."

"Oh, but d'ey nefer brought me any-ting, mein friendt. I shvere to it. D'ose fellers dook der shvag to Kopfstein."

"Kopfstein, eh?"

"Yes, mein friendt."

"Is d'is on der dead?"

"Yes, yes, d'ot vas der trut', I shvere it."

"'Cause if it ain't, I'll be right back here w'd me pals, an' we'll wreck d'e joint. See?"

"Oh, mein friendt, you vill findt d'at v'at I dell you is gorrect."

"I hope so, for youse sake. But looker heer, Ikey, how did yer happen ter tumble to der perdjiff's sack d'at d'ey took d'e swag ter Kopfstein's?"

"Oh, mein boy, Shakey, vas ofer d'ere, und doldt me."

"Oh, d'e gang didn't spiel it?"

"Nein, mein friendt."

"I'm kinder sorry it was Kopfstein 'stead o' youse, Ikey."

"How vas d'at?"

"'Cause I kinder wanted ter t'row d'e boodle in youse's way 'stead o' his'n."

"V'at you mean, mein friendt?"

And the old man's face became a picture of eagerness.

"Oh, nuttin', on'y I t'ought d'at w'erever I found d'e boodle I'd whack up lib'ral wi't him as had it. See?"

The Jew was silent.

He was evidently in a dilemma what to do.

And while he continued to ponder the proposition, the detective continued:

"Spesh'ly d'e gold bars. Yer see each one o' d'em bars is marked w'd d'e owner's scratch, an' if d'e cops runs onto d'em d'ey'll swipe d'e lot. Now, my lay was d'is: I perpose ter take der gold bars w'ot d'e cops 'ud smoke in er minit', an' git yer inter der hobbles, an' leave all der shiners fer youse."

The Jew looked very serious, and his lips moved greedily. At last he said:

"I would do it in a minit', but d'ot Kopfstein—"

"Oh, blow Kopfstein!" interrupted Thad. "W'ot's he got ter do w'd der deal? It's dead atween me an' youse. See? If yer wanter deal, I'm ye'r cherry; if not, spiel."

"But der rest of der gang, mein friendt?"

"Them be blowed, too! Soon's d'ey find d'e deal's b'in made d'ey won't dure to whimper, 'cause d'ey know I'd let 'em in, quick."

The old man hesitated and seemed on the point of wavering, and then appeared to suddenly change his mind, and said:

"No, no, Molly, I don't could do it, pe-cause der cold pars und der monish was both at Kopfstein's. It vas better v'at you go to Kopfstein's, mein friendt."

The detective turned and looked the Jew straight in the eye, while an expression of terrible determination came over his features.

"Looker heer, Jew," he finally muttered, shaking his clinched fist close to the old man's nose, "d'em gold bars an' d'at swag is heer. See? An' ef youse don't fork over d'e bars, youse is a dead man."

With that he took a step forward and grasped the Jew by the beard. It was impossible to reach his throat.

To his great surprise, the old man did not evince the least show of fear, smiled, and said:

"Oh, mein friendt, you wouldn't hurt der old man, would you?"

"No, curse yer! but I'll kill yer, if yer don't come out w'd d'at swag mighty quick."

"Oh, vell, yoost as you say," responded the old man, calmly. "I wouldn't haf' no vords mit you for a schmall matter like d'ot."

Thad relaxed his hold on the fellow's beard, and the latter turned and started toward the rear of the shanty, with the invitation:

"Gome d'is vay, Molly."

The detective started to follow his ancient guide, and soon found himself in a labyrinth of second-hand goods and plunder of every description, so that, with the dim light in the dingy, almost windowless shanty, he could hardly pick his way.

The Jew appeared to experience no such difficulty, however, for he had gone on with remarkable speed, and was soon out of sight of the detective.

Thad toiled on for a long time, running into a short, narrow path left by the ill-smelling goods piled on either side, only to find that it ended with some mammoth stack of plunder, and he would again be obliged to retrace his steps. But when he would try another path or aisle he would ultimately meet with the same luck.

The day was hot and this place was close and poorly ventilated, so that it was not long before he was reeking with perspiration.

He was also exasperated almost beyond endurance.

What was to be done? It mattered not which way he turned, it was but to find himself in as bad a predicament as ever.

Why had the Jew run off and left him?

Had the old rascal counted upon this very thing as a solution of his own dilemma?

The detective thought of this, and realized that he had no right to expect mercy at the hands of the Jew after threatening him as he had done.

He thought once or twice of calling to the Jew, but reconsidered the matter, and remained silent.

Still, there seemed no hope of ever finding his way out of the place, and at last resolved upon the desperate alternative of hallooing.

Raising his voice, he called with all the power of his lungs:

"Ikey! Isaac! Mr. Blottstein! I say, Ikey, old boy! W're in blazes air ye?"

But it was all of no avail. If the Jew really heard him, he paid no attention to the distracted man's calls.

Again and again did the detective try to arouse his treacherous guide with his voice, but always with the same result.

At length he gave up the idea, and made one more attempt to find his way out.

This time he selected a road at random, knowing that it was a mere matter of luck, anyway.

But to his surprise and delight, this particular road did not, like the others, terminate abruptly before he had taken a dozen steps, but continued on and on, apparently interminably.

He followed on with rapid stride, growing more eager with every step.

At length the pale gray light of the waning day broke upon his vision and he knew that he was not far from an outlet of some kind, so he pushed on with greater eagerness than ever.

But he had gone but a short distance after this when he was brought to a standstill by the sound of voices.

He listened, and discovered that the speakers were but a few yards away from him, and in the very direction he was going.

Thad was once more in a quandary.

Would it be policy to push on? he asked himself, or should he remain still until the parties, whoever they were, should leave?

After a moment's reflection, he decided upon the former course, and renewed his march, but moving with extreme caution so as to make no noise.

A few steps brought him to a turn in the path and an open door, through which the light of out-of-doors burst upon him.

The light was dull and gray, but it was sufficient to disclose the figures of four men, one of whom the detective guessed was the old Jew, standing just outside the door, and he could see and hear that they were talking in an excited manner.

CHAPTER IX.

BETTER THAN EXPECTED.

Knowing that he could not be seen in the dark room where he was by the men who were out in the light, the detective ventured a little closer, so that he was enabled to catch a word here and there, but as their faces were turned toward the house, and consequently in shadow, it was impossible to discern what their appearance was.

This much he made out, however, from the tone of their voices, that one of them besides Blottstein was a Jew.

Another one of the voices, too, sounded familiar, but such was the confusion of their conversation that he was unable to fix the individuality of the person in his mind.

So eager was the detective to find out who the men were, rather than the subject of their conversation, that he pressed on closer to the door and was about to secrete himself at one side of the jamb for the purpose of listening and watching, when old Blottstein happened to glance in the direction and caught sight of him.

"D'ot vas der feller, shendlemens," he said, jerking his thumb in the direction. "D'ot vas der feller v'at saidt he vas Molly der Shat. V'at you do mit him?"

Thad crouched behind the door, planted his back against the wall, drew his two revolvers, and waited for them to make up their minds as to what they should do.

There was an animated discussion for some moments as to the better course of procedure, during which he heard the word "detective" frequently repeated, and finally he heard one, who appeared to be somewhat in authority, say:

"Oh, what's the use? If he's a detective, as you think, he will get the best of it in the end—unless we kill him, and that would be a decided mistake."

"D'at ish fery drue, mein friendt," rejoined another, "but we gan gif him a scare d'at vill learn him not to gome bok-ing his nosh in our peesness again."

"How are you going to do that?"

"Oh, yoost make a rush on him with our bistols trawn, und make him t'ink we're after his heardt's ploo."

"In the mean time, if he is a detective worthy of the name, he will not only make us think he is after our heart's blood, but he is liable to spill some of it. My idea is to give him a chance to escape without learning any more of our business than necessary."

Comprehending now that there was a want of unity among the men, Thad decided to put a hasty end to the discussion.

With that end in view, he stepped from his place of concealment and stood in the door with his revolvers leveled on the crowd.

"W'ot was d'at youse fellers was t'inking 'bout doin'?" he demanded, in a hoarse guttural.

There was a general movement on the part of the men.

Some darted in one direction, and some in another.

Two of them had gone plunging down the steps, and these Thad was more interested in than any of the others (he now noticed that there were a half dozen altogether), for the reason that he had seen them before.

One was the Jew, Israel Murdoch, as he was known to Hargrave, or Sheeny Mose, as he was known among the crooked fraternity and to the police, and the other was none other than little Gamm, the broker.

Who the rest of the gang were Thad had failed to discover, as they had disappeared so suddenly, for one thing, and his eyes had been too busy with the two worthies in question to see much of anything else.

He did not attempt to pursue the fugitives, but watched them until they had disappeared, and then turning to the old Jew, who appeared to have been too much panic-stricken to run, he asked:

"Who are those men, Isaac?"

The Jew stared at him in open-eyed wonder.

Thad then realized that he had forgotten his dialect, but considering that it was too late to rectify the mistake, repeated the question in the same manner of speech:

"Who are those fellows who were just here?"

"S'elp me, Moshes! I don't know von of d'em," protested the old man, solemnly.

"What is the use of lying to me, you old rascal, when you must know that I know better?"

"Oh, I hope I may die—"

"Stop, you old hypocrite! Didn't I hear you say a while ago that you knew Sheeny Mose?"

"Oh, mein gracious! Vas Sheeny Mose by d'ot gang?" queried the Jew, with a look of amazement. "I wish I had known d'ot."

"You did know it. You were talking to him."

"I vas dalking to all the shendlemens, mein friendt, but I vas never tumbled d'ot von of d'em vas Sheeny Mose. He must have been diskized."

"Well, never mind him now. Who was the other man with him?"

"Oh, d'ere vas fife or six shendlemens, mein friendt."

"I mean the man that went down the steps there with Mose."

"S'elp me, I vas nefer notished vich

vay any of d'em vent, I vas so scared by d'em bistols of yours. Py der vay, you don't vas dalk der same as v'en you fierst vas coom. How vas d'ot?"

Thad was forced to laugh at the old man's apparent simplicity, although he did not know but it might have been affected.

"Oh, I have a way of changing my voice at certain hours of the day, Ikey," he said.

The Jew also broke out into a sharp, strident cackle, and said:

"I guess I vas know already vas ist das. You vas a detective, ain't it?"

"Be it so," replied the detective, becoming suddenly grave. "Now that we understand each other, and you have already admitted that you have those gold bars which were stolen in Wall Street, I shall have to ask you to give them up without more ado."

This had the effect of changing the old man's merriment into the severest seriousness again, and he protested:

"I shvere I don't vas got d'ose cold pars, mein friendt—I shvere it!"

"But I know you have, because you admitted it a while ago."

"D'ot vas v'en you fierst coom, mein friendt."

"Certainly."

"Und I t'ought you vas Molly der Shat, already?"

"Well?"

The old Jew broke forth into another cackle.

"I t'ought I would fool you."

"What was your motive for fooling me?"

"You would onsist d'at I haf der cold pars und I t'ought d'at vas der only vay to get rid mit you."

"Come, that won't do. I am satisfied that you have that gold here, and unless you produce it forthwith I shall have to take you with me."

But the old fellow was too sharp to be intimidated by any such a threat as that. He smiled, rubbed his hands and said:

"I don't vas see v'at you vas arrest me for, mein friendt, unless I vas got d'em cold pars. I gif you leaf to look t'rough my blace, und if you find d'em cold pars d'ere, d'en you may arrest me right away quick."

This was a settler, for the detective realized the futility of attempting to find anything in that place, and he knew that he had no right to arrest the old man unless he did find some of the stolen plunder.

Nevertheless, he thought it would not be amiss to try one more game of bluff, and said:

"Oh, so far as that is concerned, I can arrest you on suspicion, taking your own admission, although you claim it was only a joke, as a foundation. Your past record will go a long way toward bearing me out in the assumption of your guilt."

Even this failed to move the old man, who shrugged indifferently, and answered coolly:

"Very vell, mein friendt, you haf it in your power to arrest me, I supposh; but v'at d'en? Der gourt vill orter a search of my bremlises, und d'en v'en a vind nodings, v'at d'en? Old Ikey goes free, yoost as he always has."

Thad now saw that he had made a mistake all the way through and the only way out of the dilemma was to compromise.

"Well, I am satisfied that you are telling me the truth, Unole Isaac," he said. "I do not believe that you have the swag. But how about old Kopfstein?"

The Jew drew up his shoulders, arched his eyebrows, and put his hands together.

"Vell," he answered, "if mein poy don't vas dold me a lie, Kopfstein vas got dose cold pars und dot shvag. I don't vas know meinself, but d'ot ish v'at mein poy, Shakey, vas dold me."

"Which was probably the truth. The boy would hardly lie about a matter of that kind. By the way, is Kopfstein still in his old place, Uncle Isaac?"

"Oh, yes, in der same blace."

Thad had hoped that he would volun-

teer to give the address, but the old chap was too wary for that.

"Let me see. Kopfstein used to be on Third Avenue, between—be—tween—"

The Jew interrupted him with a burst of his ear-splitting laughter.

"Bedween v'as?" he laughed.

"Blessed if the exact address hasn't slipped my memory."

"I should t'ink it hat, mein friendt," said the Jew, still laughing. "Aaron Kopfstein vas not on Dird Afenue, und nefer vas. I guess you vas nefer knowed v'ere he vas."

"Oh, yes; I am sure that I once knew, although I may have him mixed up with another party."

The detective was more confused than he had ever been in an attempt to carry out a ruse in his life, but he was determined not to be so easily defeated, so he put his hand into his pocket, drew out a ten-dollar bill, held it out to the Jew with the laughing remark:

"I guess you are right, after all, Uncle Ikey, but I guess somebody else knows, and wouldn't mind telling for a small consideration."

The old man, to the detective's utter surprise, looked down upon the tempting bill with a scornful frown, and then spat at it, and answered:

"You t'ief of a Ghristian! you offer me d'at to bedray mein best friendt? Go vay mit your monish. You gif me un t'ousand dollars I not do it."

So saying he turned and entered his shanty.

To say that Thad was astonished is to state it mildly, but a second thought was sufficient to solve the mystery.

He knew the old scoundrel too well to suppose for an instant that he possessed sufficient loyalty to enable him to refuse a bribe, though ever so insignificant, to betray his best friend. So the secret must lie in another direction, and the detective was not long in discovering the direction and the cause.

His refusal to betray Aaron Kopfstein's whereabouts was brought about by the fact that Aaron Kopfstein was a myth, pure and simple—there was no such man. And now that he came to recall the fact, Thad remembered that the old shark had used this dodge—of referring to mythical people—for the purpose of getting out of a tight place himself, on a previous occasion.

Finding that nothing was to be got out of the cunning old chap, and that some other means would have to be employed, the detective quietly walked down the rickety steps to the rough, ungraded apology for a street, picked his way through the darkness to the Boulevard and took a down-town car.

It was long past dinner time when he reached home, and not only was dinner waiting for him, but also a gentleman, as the servant informed him.

On going to his studio he found Hargrave there.

"Well, old fellow," he began, "what news?"

But instead of answering, the young man arose to his feet, stared at the detective in a dazed sort of way, and finally stammered:

"I beg your pardon, but I don't believe I have the pleasure of your acquaintance. Is Mr. Burr about, that you know?"

Before he had finished speaking, Thad had divined the cause of the young man's strange conduct. Chancing to glance in a mirror, he discovered what he had forgotten for the moment, that he was still made up as an East Side thug.

He roared with laughter at the young man's expense, and then explained matters.

CHAPTER X.

A LITTLE PROGRESS.

When the Man from Mexico found out that the tough-looking individual was in reality the detective, there was a mutual laugh on both sides.

"I am not surprised that nobody would recognize you," observed the young man,

"when I failed to do so in your own house."

"You must have been surprised to see so rough looking a character walking deliberately into my studio," laughed Thad.

"No, I wasn't so much surprised at that, as I knew you, in your peculiar calling, were compelled to affiliate more or less with all kinds of strange characters. The only thing that surprised me was the familiarity with which you approached me, whom, as I supposed, you had never seen before."

Thad laughed again.

"You had no cause for surprise on that score, for had I really been what I appeared—a typical East Side tough—you would probably have been approached with a proposition for a small loan. But what news? Have you seen or heard anything?"

"Yes, a little."

"Let us have it then, by all means."

And the detective, who was somewhat exhausted from his day's work, threw himself into a chair wearily, and prepared to listen.

But at that moment his wife came in and inquired whether he intended to have his dinner that night or wait till the next day.

"My dear," said Thad, rising quickly and laughing, "my stomach says now."

"Then you had better change that face of yours to something resembling respectability," laughed his wife. "I am not in the habit of allowing gentlemen of your present appearance to sit at my table."

"You are right, my dear, and I shall be with you in a minute."

With that he set to work removing his make-up, and in ten minutes had restored himself to his normal appearance.

Hargrave retained his make-up, which, as we know, was nothing out of the way, and the two men repaired to the dining-room.

The rest of the family had already dined, so that as soon as the meal was under way they were left to themselves, and the detective resumed conversation by saying:

"You were saying that you had learned a little. We can talk and eat at the same time, so let us have it."

"Well, to begin with," responded the young man, "I have paid a number of visits to the hotel for the ostensible purpose of asking for my mail, or rather for the mail of Manton Hargrave, and invariably inquired, incidentally, for Madden. I was always told that he was out, but when I went there this evening I was informed that he had returned to his room, so I asked to be shown up."

"But just as I went to take the elevator the car came down, and who should step out, carpet-bag in hand, but Mr. Madden."

"He appeared to be in a great hurry, and attempted to rush by me, but I laid my hand on his arm and detained him. He turned upon me with an angry scowl and wanted to know what I wanted with him."

"This is Mr. Madden, I believe," I said.

"Well, what of it?" he snarled.

"I wish to have a word with you," said I.

"Speak quick, then, for I am in a hurry."

"You had until recently a room-mate by the name of Hargrave, had you not?"

"Well?" he growled.

"What has become of him?"

"Ask somebody that knows."

"You do not know where he is, then?"

"In Halifax, I hope!"

"And he attempted to tear himself loose and rush away, but I detained him, and said in the politest manner I knew how:

"One moment, please. Perhaps you can tell me where his friend, Israel Murdoch, can be found?"

"He glared ferociously at me, and muttered: 'What do I know about Hargrave or his pals, either? Possibly the police can tell you!'"

"With that he tore himself loose and hurried away."

"But I was determined that he should not escape me so easily, and hurried after him. When I reached the hotel office, and before he had had a chance to see me, I saw that he was settling his bill. I waited till he was through and had stepped out

into the hall, and then entered by another door, approached the desk, and asked the clerk if Madden had settled his bill with the intention of leaving the hotel, to which I was informed that he had."

"I waited to hear no more, but hurried out of the hotel, and reached the street in the nick of time to see my good fellow taking a cab."

"Determined to find out where he was going, I walked along a little distance to where a one-horse rig was standing, and when the eager Jehu approached me I informed him that I wanted him to drive me anywhere and everywhere that that other rig over there—indicating the other cab—should go. The other vehicle was already starting off."

"Cabby nodded and smiled, and said in a confidential tone: 'A case av shadowin', eh, sor? Wal, Oi'm wid yez in a dale lolke thot, an' it's miny av thim Oi've been into. Jump in, sor.'"

"And in another second we were under way, keeping the other cab in view."

"Why, you're quite up to the detective trick," interrupted Thad, laughing.

"Perhaps. Well, the foremost cab rolled down to the bridge, and we in its wake, and then across the bridge it went. At Broadway the front cab turned up-town, and I told myself that Madden was making for the depot with the intention of jumping the town, and so we followed him on up the street."

"But I soon found that he was not making for the Grand Central, anyway, for at Bleeker Street, I think it was, he turned west, and soon came to an elevated railway station."

"Here he alighted from the cab and ran up the elevated stairs. I quickly followed his example, and reached the station just in time to purchase a ticket and gain the platform as the guard was closing the gate. I managed to get on the train, however, but in the mean time had lost sight of my fugitive."

"So I began a search of the train, passing from one car to another, but do you know that, although I made two trips from one end of that train to the other, not a sign of Madden was to be seen."

"Perhaps," interposed Thad, "he jumped off just as he saw you getting on."

"That was what I thought, and it was in my mind to get off at the next station and take the next train back. But I soon saw the folly of such a move, and remained on the train. I had never been in the upper part of the city, and concluded to take a ride up there while I was on the train."

"I didn't let my man slip out of my mind, however, and watched the faces of the passengers as they left the train and filed along the platform at each station."

"At length we got away up-town—I forget the station now, but I know it was not far from the terminus of the road—and I was watching the crowd of passengers string along the platform as usual. Only a few got off at this station, and I had all the better chance of watching them. Nearly all had got off, and I had despaired of seeing my man, when a man came hurrying along with a carpet-bag in his hand."

"I did not recognize the man, but I did the bag. It was the same that Madden had had. I knew it from seeing it so much about the room when we were together."

"Quicker than thought I was on my feet and rushing for the door, and reached it just as the train was moving. The gate was already closed, and the gateman tried to prevent me from getting off, but I proved to be the stronger, hurled him to one side, dashed open the gate and jumped off, just as the train had reached the end of the platform. Another second, and I would have jumped into the street."

"My man had had time to get out of sight, but I wasn't a second getting down those stairs, and I knew that I had the advantage of him in being empty-handed, whereas he had the valise to carry."

"When I reached the bottom of the stairs I stopped and looked about. There were not many people stirring, but it was growing dark by this time, and it was

difficult to discern any one at a great distance. Presently, however, I espied a man in the distance carrying a carpet-bag and making off on one of the side streets—one of those which they are grading through the rocks."

"I know," said Thad. "By the way, what time of day was this?"

"I don't know exactly what time it was—it must have been in the neighborhood of eight o'clock, I should think, as it was growing dark."

"Go on."

"The fellow I was following had something like half a block the start of me, but I pushed on as rapidly as I could, almost running, and soon came up to within a few yards of him. Still, I could neither make out whether he was Madden nor whether he was the man I had seen with the carpet-bag I had recognized as Madden's. So I determined to walk up alongside of him and satisfy myself upon both points."

"I quickened my steps, and was soon alongside of my man, but just then, and before I had had time to satisfy myself on either question, the fellow turned abruptly aside and began to climb up a stairway that led to the top of the rocks at the side of the road. I stopped and looked up, and saw that there was a shanty on top of the rocks, and that several men stood in front."

"The men were talking excitedly, and when the man I had been following joined the group, one of them said: 'Ah, here he is at last!' and another, who seemed to be very old and bent, took the satchel from him and went inside with it. He soon came out again, however, and then there was a lot more talk, and I heard the word 'detective' frequently made use of, and I concluded the man I had been following was telling them about me, and that they had decided that I was a detective."

Thad laughed heartily.

He knew that this was the identical conversation that he had overheard from his hiding place inside the shanty, and had thought at that time that the word "detective" used by the men referred to himself; but now, since hearing the young man's story, he was not so certain on this point.

"It was not entirely unnatural that I should have been taken for a detective under the circumstances," interjected Hargrave, coloring somewhat.

"Not at all," replied Thad. "I was not laughing at that exactly, but at the recollection of a little experience of my own. I happened to overhear a part of the same conversation, and I imagined they were alluding to me when they spoke of a detective."

"You heard the same conversation?" queried the young man, with a puzzled countenance. "Why, where were you at the time?"

"Inside the shanty. But, never mind. What happened next?"

"Why, pretty soon some one appeared in the doorway. I couldn't see very distinctly, but it seemed as if he held a couple of revolvers in his hands. This I thought very strange, as he had come out of the same house that the old man had gone into and come out of, and then I concluded that whoever the fellow was, he was pointing his pistols at me. And, as the next instant two of the men came dashing down the stairs toward me, and I believed that they were after me, I decided that my theory had been correct, and did not wait to investigate any farther."

"You ran?" laughed Thad.

"Ran? Running does not half express it. I flew."

"Where did you go?"

"Direct to the station."

"And took the train?"

"And took the down-town train."

Thad indulged in a long fit of laughing, and finally, as soon as he could recover his voice, said:

"That accounts for your beating me here, my boy. But have you any idea who it was that appeared at the door of the shanty with the revolvers in his hands?"

The young man stared across the table at

his host with a wondering countenance for some seconds.

At length he faltered timidly:

"You don't mean to say, sir, that—that—"

"It was your humble servant," interrupted the detective, still laughing.

He then went on to relate the incidents of his own adventure at the "fence," and in conclusion said:

"In my opinion some of the boodle stolen from you in Wall Street was in that bag. They probably have it concealed some place and are conveying it to the fence piecemeal."

CHAPTER XI.

A MIDNIGHT PROWL.

Thad and his guest returned to the studio, and, after lighting a cigar and throwing himself back in an easy chair, resumed:

"Yes, the more I think about it, the more fully convinced do I become that this gang has got that money hidden away some place, and are removing it, little at a time, to the old Jew's fence."

"But I followed Madden from the St. George Hotel, as I told you. It cannot be that he had the treasure hidden there?"

"There is no telling. He might at least have had a portion of it in his bag. Possibly, however, he had only taken it from the general depositing place, and, having occasion to call at his room, took it with him. However this may be, I'm satisfied that some, if not all, of the treasure is at present deposited with the Jew, and my purpose is to pay him another call to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes."

"For what purpose?"

"To discover, if possible, whether the treasure is there or not."

"How will you find out? You say he denied everything before."

"That was because I did not know as much of the affair as I do now. I shall not take his word this time, but look for myself."

"Do you want company?"

"Certainly, by all means."

"Then I shall go with you."

"Do; I shall be glad of your company. Indeed, I should have invited you anyway. But," he went on, looking at his watch, "it is nearly time we were going. I must make up."

Accordingly the detective made himself up, this time to represent a Wild Westerner of the most extreme type—a cowboy, in fact.

So artistically was the task completed that Hargrave, who had lived among these people for so long, went into raptures of admiration over him and insisted upon being made up in a similar manner.

Luckily Thad had another long-haired wig and a pair of the long bushy mustache and goatees, so he transformed the young man into a genuine Western cowboy in appearance.

They then armed themselves with revolvers and knives, and set out upon their midnight prowling.

Walking across and taking the Sixth Avenue line, in half an hour they alighted on the platform of the up-town station where they wished to go.

They walked along the newly-graded street to where the steps ascended the cliff and climbed them, one after the other.

When they reached the top they saw that the shanty was in total darkness.

"The old man has retired, I suppose," suggested Thad.

"Worn out with his hard day's labor in receiving stolen goods," added Hargrave.

"We'll disturb his slumbers," said Thad.

So saying, he knocked at the door, but there was no response.

He had given an ordinary knock, but after waiting for some time, he delivered the crook's knock. But even this did not have the effect of bringing any one to the door or cause an audible movement within.

"He must be a sound sleeper," observed Hargrave.

"Our only alternative is to break in the door."

"It won't be a very difficult task, I prophesy."

"From the looks of it, no."

"Shall I procure a stone?"

"Yes."

The Man from Mexico went down the steps and soon returned with a huge stone, and with it set to belaboring the frail door.

Not many strokes were delivered before the feeble structure yielded and the door flew open.

The two men listened for some indication of movement within, but everything was as still as the grave.

"It can't be that the old Jew has deserted the place?" ventured Hargrave, in a low whisper.

"Not likely. He would hardly go off and leave all his plunder here."

"Temporarily, I mean. Anticipating that you or the police might return, might he not have gone away for the night?"

"Even that I deem unlikely. In my opinion this stillness means something entirely different."

"What?"

And the young man clutched the detective's arm spasmodically.

"Oh, nothing to be very much alarmed at," interjected Thad, by way of encouragement for his young comrade. "Only it is more than likely that the old man, and possibly some of his clan, are laying for us."

"And may pick us off before we are aware of it?"

"Very likely."

The detective's demeanor was so cool and unperturbed that Hargrave was dumfounded.

Westerner as he was, he could not understand such indifference in the face of danger.

And the young man made up his mind that he himself would not be outdone in the matter of bravery, and said:

"Very well, come on. I am with you. You cannot venture anywhere that is too dangerous for me."

Thad grasped his hand.

"That's the way to talk," he said. "That shows that you have the true mettle in you. Come on."

Thad pushed along into the interior of the hut, but had gone but a little way when he ran up against a pile of plunder.

Hargrave was close behind him, and when Thad came to such a sudden stop the young man thought he had already encountered an enemy, and sprang back.

But the succeeding instant he was reassured, for the detective flashed the light of his dark lantern in order to see where he was going, and the young man discovered the cause of his friend's stopping. But he doubted the wisdom of flashing the light, and whispered:

"Isn't it a little dangerous to have a light?"

"Perhaps. But not more so than to get tangled up in this labyrinth of plunder."

The Man from Mexico offered no further protest, and they moved on.

After a good deal of twisting and turning they reached the rear end of the hut, and here a door led off into an addition, as it seemed.

The door was locked, and, in addition, a number of heavy chains were drawn across it.

The door itself was constructed of heavy oak planks and fastened together with powerful iron bolts.

Thad looked back at his companion, who was staring in awe at the apparently impregnable barrier.

"There is where the treasure is," he whispered. "That accounts for the carelessness in barricading the other door."

"How are we going to get through that door?" queried the young man, whose eyes were still fixed upon it. "We'll never effect an entrance there in the world."

"Not unless we try."

The detective then proceeded to examine the lock.

It was a ponderous affair, and would defy anything short of a heavy jimmy or crowbar.

He then examined the wall on either side of the door. There was nothing im-

pregnable about that, so far as he could see—a flimsy, plastered wall, such as are to be found in cheap cottages, and he wondered that such a door should be put into such a frail wall.

"Our plan will be to make a hole through the wall," he said. "If we can find some sort of a crowbar, we can soon effect an entrance in this direction."

A little culling among the huge piles of old iron, which embraced tools of nearly every description, resulted in the finding of the very article they wanted—a heavy crowbar. This, together with an axe, they took along with them and returned to the scene of their proposed operations.

Thus far Thad had taken no precaution about secrecy, and had not appeared to care whether any possible lurking enemies heard or saw him or not, but now, before beginning operations, he stopped to listen, and even moved his light about the masses of plunder to ascertain whether any one was in sight or hearing.

Hearing or seeing nothing, he was satisfied, and turned his attention to his work.

First he hewed the plaster and laths away, leaving only the outside weatherboarding, which was of thin pine boards, easily cut through. But when he came to strike his axe into it, he found that it was backed up by something more substantial.

In fact, upon investigation, he discovered that the shanty was built plump against a cliff!

"That accounts for the strong door," he observed. "It doubtless opens into an excavation, natural or artificial, in the rock, and our only resource is to get that door open."

Hargrave, who was regarding the ponderous door again, shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't believe we can ever do it," he said.

This nettled the detective somewhat, for there was nothing so calculated to make him lose his patience as to hear any one express despair in advance of a difficulty, so he did not deign to reply to the remark, and set to belaboring the stubborn lock with the crowbar.

But he was not long in making the discovery that his efforts were futile, that it would require more power than he possessed to either break or remove the lock, and he for the first time experienced a twinge of despair.

For a long time he stood pondering the subject, and at last an idea occurred to him.

Among all the miscellaneous collection of plunder, the old man must have accumulated something in the way of chemicals, and he turned away from the door and began to poke among the masses of contraband goods.

The Man from Mexico watched his operations curiously, wondering what he was about to do next, but afraid to appear too inquisitive.

After a long search Thad came across a long tin box, which he recognized at once as a medicine chest, such as they use on shipboard.

With a passing guess as to how this curious relic should have found its way into this collection, he broke open the lid, and set to examining its contents.

Being somewhat of a chemist, the articles he found in the chest were for the most part familiar to him, and he connoiced them over, one after another with as much interest as an enthusiastic apothecary might have done.

At length his search was rewarded by the discovery of the very thing he was looking for. A small phial containing a colorless liquid, and labeled "Nitric acid," was tucked away in one corner of the chest, and this he raised, examined the label, held the phial between him and the light, and finally arose from his crouching posture with an expression of great satisfaction beaming in his face.

Returning to the door, he uncorked the phial and poured a few drops on the bolt of the lock and a few more on each of the chains twined across the door.

Then, for the first time in a good while, he glanced at his young companion, whom

he found regarding him with the wonder and awe that he might have done a miracle-working alchemist of old.

Thad smiled at his simplicity, and said: "This is all mystery to you, I presume, but it is an old trick of mine. I usually carry a little of the powerful stuff with me, but had no idea I should need it on this occasion."

"What is it?" asked the other, almost breathlessly.

"Nitric acid, an agency which no element on earth can withstand."

The young man picked up the phial where the detective had thrown it after exhausting its contents, and examined the label for a few moments, and then, dropping it on the ground, asked simply:

"Is there anything you don't know, sir?"

"Oh, yes," laughed Thad. "I don't know what we are going to find when we get through this door, for instance."

After waiting a few minutes to allow the acid to do its work, he took up the crowbar again, and, placing it behind the bolt, gave it a heroic wrench.

But it did not yield, and he said quietly: "Not quite ready yet."

At the end of another ten minutes, however, he tried it again, and this time the bolt snapped like a piece of gingerbread.

CHAPTER XII.

A DAZZLING DISCOVERY.

Thad lost no time in swinging the heavy door open, and peered inside, or tried to, but without success, for it was as dark as a dungeon.

He then turned the flare of his lantern into the place.

This he did with a certain amount of trepidation, for he still entertained the suspicion that there was somebody lurking about somewhere.

What was his surprise and satisfaction, therefore, to discover a cell, not more than eight or ten feet square, partly natural and partly hewn out of the solid rock, absolutely empty, so far as he could see.

He turned and looked back at his companion, whom he found craning his neck with a view to peeping inside without venturing too close, and smiled at the young man's timidity.

"You needn't be afraid," he laughed. "There is not so much as a mouse in here to harm you."

The Man from Mexico then ventured alongside of the detective, and the two went inside.

Thad moved the glare of his lamp about the floor and walls, still in hope of finding something to repay him for his labor, but nothing beyond bare rocks was to be seen.

"This is strange," he mused. "I don't see why the old man should go to all this trouble and expense of barricading a bare room."

"Perhaps we haven't found it all," suggested Hargrave.

"That is true. There must be some other outlet or some place for the concealment of goods. No man would be such a fool as to make all this preparation without he had something worth while to hide."

"Maybe they have removed whatever there was in here in anticipation of our or the police's coming."

"That may be, but why should he have taken the trouble to bar the door after the room was empty?"

The young man made no attempt at explanation and the two set about searching for an outlet or place of concealment.

It did not take long to decide that neither the walls nor the ceiling contained any panels or openings.

The rock was either in the primitive state in which nature had left it, or showed the marks of the chisel where it had been hewn out, but it could be easily seen that no opening had been cut through, and the detective turned his attention to the floor.

This was a fairly smooth rock and comparatively clean, with the exception of a thin layer of dust which might have sifted down from the walls or been carried in on the feet of visitors to the room.

But the strangest thing about it, there

were no tracks in this dust, beyond those made by Thad and his companion.

This could not have been so, it seemed, if anybody had visited the place recently. Nevertheless, the detective got down upon his hands and knees and began a careful examination of the floor, beginning in one corner and working across by sections.

Brushing the dust or sand away with his hand, he would throw his light down upon the face of the rock and scrutinize every minute section of it.

Hargrave, seeing what his plan was, also set to work in the same way, but he was at the disadvantage of having no light except that reflected across the room from Thad's lantern.

Nevertheless, he worked on diligently, depending upon feeling for what he lacked in sight.

Thad made much greater progress and had covered nearly half the area of the floor before his companion had gone over a strip of four feet wide.

And then Thad straightened up to rest his back, and because he had little faith in finding anything after the distance he had gone unsuccessfully.

"I guess there is not much use of wasting any more time here," he observed, yawning. "Your theory that they have removed everything was doubtless the correct one."

But the Man from Mexico did not reply.

He was stooping over, with his face close to the floor, apparently intent upon something he had found.

Thad watched the young man with curious interest for some moments, and was surprised to see him first put his ear to the ground, and, after listening for a moment, put his nose down and sniff.

The action was so curious, and yet in a line with many of his own when sifting a mystery, that the detective could not refrain from giving vent to a little laugh. At length he asked:

"Well, my boy, what have you discovered—a gold mine or a perfume factory?"

"Both, I think," answered Hargrave, without raising his head.

Thad walked over to where he was, stood a moment, and then repeated the question:

"What have you found?"

"Get down here," said the other, raising himself to a sitting posture.

Thad crouched down beside him, reflected his light on the stone floor, and asked again:

"What is it? I see nothing."

"Put your ear down there."

Burr did as he was requested, and immediately opened his eyes in astonishment.

"Somebody down there," he muttered.

"If you have any doubts on the subject, put your nose to this little crevice."

Following this request, the detective sniffed and muttered:

"Tobacco smoke, or I'm an Indian! There is an apartment below there, somewhere."

"That is what I think, but the question is how to get at it."

Thad examined the floor in the vicinity of the crevice, but beyond the crevice itself, which seemed to be a fissure in the rock, and not more than a foot long, there was no indication of any flaw or break of any kind.

He looked at his companion with a perplexed countenance, and exclaimed:

"Well, this just beats anything I ever encountered. That there is another room or compartment under us there can be not the shadow of a doubt, but how to get to it, and why this room, which apparently has no connection with it, should have been locked and barred in the way it was, are the puzzling points."

"As to the first, the problem will not, I think, be hard to solve. You remember we are several feet above the level of the road and of all surrounding lands, so that there would be nothing strange if these fellows should have another story below this, and at the same time be able to enter it from the street."

"That is true. They could easily bur-

row into the side of the bank out there, and this room below us would be no more than the cellar of the shanty. But still I am puzzled about this room we are in. What use do they make of it, that they should be so careful about locking it up?"

As he delivered this last address the detective had sat down upon the floor, throwing his hand out behind him to brace himself.

As he did so his hand came in contact with something that caused him to start and look around.

As he could make out nothing in the darkness he picked up his lantern, which he had sat down, and allowed the light to fall upon the object which had attracted his attention.

The object appeared to be a bolt-head or nut, which was apparently attached to a bolt or rod passing down through the stone floor.

"I wonder what this signifies?" he muttered.

By this time Hargrave was at his side.

"In my opinion it signifies that there is a secret passage here of some sort."

"That was my first impression, but I cannot see how a secret passage could be closed or opened by means of a single bolt. Besides, if anything of the kind existed, there would be marks somewhere in the vicinity where the trap opened, and there would certainly be footprints in this sand where the visitors had come and gone."

Nevertheless, the detective gave the object a vigorous twist, but it was immovable.

This only rendered him more determined than ever to move it, if it was to be moved, so he twisted, tugged, hammered it with his fist, and finally kicked it with his boot-heel; but all to no avail. It would not budge.

At length he went outside and brought in the crowbar, and with this began jamming about the bolt-head. But beyond scarring and denting it, he produced no effect upon it.

At length he threw down the crowbar in disgust.

"That has nothing to do with any opening," he said, "if there is such a thing—which I very much doubt. Let us see what can be found outside."

And he strode toward the door.

But as he was about to pass out something caught his eye which he had hitherto overlooked.

At one side of the door, and close to the jamb, was another bolt-head, similar to the one on the floor.

It had no connection with the door, and had no apparent reason for being there.

He was about to stop and examine it, but recollecting his experience with the other, he decided not to.

However, he had gone but a few steps when he was arrested by the young man, who said, in a low, but excited tone:

"Look here, sir."

On turning he saw that Hargrave was intently working at something at the side of the door.

"What is it?" he asked, without retracing his steps.

"Come see! Bring the light!" cried the other, enthusiastically.

Burr walked back with not very good grace, held up the light, and was about to repeat his question, but his eyes told him in advance.

The Man from Mexico had pulled the bolt out so that it protruded from the wall the distance of a foot.

Instinctively, Thad glanced in the direction of the other bolt-head on the floor, expecting to see that some change had been made in its position, but in this he was disappointed. It was just where he had left it.

However, his curiosity would not allow him to rest there, and he felt impelled to walk back and take another tug at the nut.

To his surprise it came up with perfect ease, and as it did so a section of rock to which the other bolt was attached, and which had appeared to be only a projecting portion of the solid cliff, swung around, leaving a black hole in the wall.

Thad hastened to the spot, and threw his light into the aperture.

The hole did not extend more than two feet into the rock, but at its farther extremity was a small iron-bound box or casket.

The detective uttered a cry of surprise and joy, and attempted to lift the casket out of its place of concealment, but found it not an easy task.

It was necessary to call his companion to his assistance, and the two had all they wanted to lift the box to the floor.

"At last!" exclaimed Hargrave, with a deep sigh of relief.

"Don't crow too soon," admonished Thad.

"Don't you think it contains treasure?"

"Undoubtedly; but it may not contain your treasure."

"I'll bet it does—part of it, anyway."

"Well, we shall soon see. Fetch the crowbar."

Hargrave brought the implement from the middle of the floor where Thad had dropped it, and handed it to him.

"It seems a pity to break the pretty thing," mused the detective, "but as we have no key, it has got to be done."

With that he set to prying at the iron strap which held the lid down.

By little he succeeded in working the lever under the strap, and at length secured a sufficient purchase, and then threw his weight upon the handle of the crowbar.

The strap gave way, and the next instant Thad and his companion were kneeling beside the box, and the former lifted the lid and flooded the casket with light.

The sight that met their gaze was enough to turn the head of an ordinary mortal. Such a collection of coin, gold bars and precious stones even Thad had never witnessed in one bunch.

CHAPTER XIII.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

At the very same time that Thad and his friend from Mexico were engaged in breaking locks, searching for secret passages and discovering treasure, there was a secret council in progress at no great distance from where they were.

In a room not more than fifteen feet square were gathered five men, of vastly varying external appearance, temperament and stations in life.

Two of them were brokers, and are already known to the reader as Spofford and Gamm, one of them was a small, dark man, also known as Sylvester Madden; one a short, thick-set man, variously known as Israel Murdoch, Sheeny Mose and by various other aliases, and the fifth was our venerable Jewish friend, Uncle Isaac.

They were clustered about a table, on which were displayed several brands of beverages, a box of cigars, a box of tobacco, and an assortment of pipes, which the various members of the council were indulging in according to taste.

They were engaged in a discussion of apparent vital interest to all parties present, and it was evident that there was not the harmony among them that should exist among warm friends.

Spofford, who was indisputably the leading spirit, had been laying out some plans which he appeared to expect the others to follow, but which did not seem to meet with their entire approbation.

"The only thing to be done under the circumstances," he began, in his usual pompous tone, "is to leave the treasure where it is for the present. Uncle Ikey can take care of it better than any one else, and it is less likely to be discovered where it is than it would be with any of the rest of us. Besides, if it should happen to be discovered where it is, nobody but Uncle Ikey will be suspected, and you all know his faculty for getting out of tight places."

"Yes yes, mein friendt," chuckled the old man, proud of the flattery, "d'ey has ter pe mighty smart fellers v'at catches d'e old man napping."

"If we divide it, on the other hand," the broker went on, "ten chances to one

some one of us will get caught, that is, the treasure will be found in some one of our possessions, and then a fig for the rest of us."

"Do you mean to say, sir," demanded Madden, angrily, "that any one of us is capable of betraying the rest?"

"I say nothing," said the broker, with an affable smile, "but I have been in this world a good while—longer than any of you, except my ancient friend Isaac there—and have had to deal with a good many different kinds of men, and I have always found that there is but one safe course, and that is to keep your own counsel. The bandit Murrell's motto was that 'dead men tell no tales.' A very good motto, but the next best one is to keep your own counsel. I should dislike greatly to think for an instant that any of my fellows in this club could find it in his heart to betray me; but, on the other hand, I should be afraid to trust myself under certain provocations."

"This may be all very well for you," demurred Madden, "who have plenty of dust to go on; but it is different with me."

"Me, do," put in Murdoch. "It's all fery nice to haf' a pank agcount, but it's difference v'en sompody else garries der pank-book und you vas hunery—v'at?"

"But you will all get your share in good time," insisted Spofford, coaxingly. "All I desire is that the treasure be let alone until this investigation of the detectives and police blows over, and then a fair division will be made. At present, so closely watched are we, and so sharp a lookout are they keeping for the appearance of any of the gold bars or coin, that none of it could be used without great risk."

"But der monish do lif' by?" persisted Murdoch.

"That's what's worrying me," added Madden.

"Oh, as to that, if any of you boys want a little change to keep you going, I have no doubt Uncle Isaac will be only too happy to supply you."

"Oh, yes, mein friendt," mumbled the old Jew, "if any of you shendlemens vas neet any monish, you only have to say der vord, und der old man vill be doo glad to aggomodate you—vith a fery shmall interest, of gourse."

"Yes, we know what your very small interest is, you old Shylock," snarled Madden. "Thirty-three and a third is about the size of it."

"D'irty-d'ree und a d'ird," echoed Murdoch, "und v'en der monish vas not fort-goming, der bound of vlesh. Oh, how I hate me d'ose Chews."

"You hates d'em Shews, eh?" screeched the old man, glaring across the table at his kinsman. "Holy Apraham! if I vas a sheeny like you, so helup me, Moshes, I'd trown myselef doo quick!"

"Idt would be petter for der gommunity if you would do d'at right away, anyhow, you old crafe-ropper!"

"Peace, gentlemen, peace," interposed the sweet-tempered Mr. Spofford. "Remember we are brothers, not antagonists, and our dealings with one another should be that of loving kinsmen, not that of sordid, bickering mercenaries. My dealings with Uncle Isaac, which have extended over a period of years—how many, Uncle Ikey?"

"Apout dwenty-seven, I d'ink—efer since der pank-roppery in—"

"Sh—s—sh!" admonished the broker, sweetly. "Let by-gones be by-gones, Uncle Ikey."

"Yes, yes, ve let py-gones pe py-gones," snarled the old man, evidently rankling over the recollection of some past wrong. "All der same, I don't vas forget d'at you vas nefer bald me my share of d'at shob."

"Well well, my friend, I owe it to you, as I have often told you before, and—"

"Und you vas likely to owe it to me till I vas tead und puried."

"What I was about to say, gentlemen," resumed the broker, in the same benevolent tone, "was that during all my many years of dealing with Uncle Isaac, I have never found him out of the way in his accounts to the fraction of a cent. No, gen-

lemen, I can honestly say that I have never had reason for complaint."

"No vonder," mumbled the old man, half to himself. "You vas always got der whole hog."

"Well, gentlemen, the matter is settled, then," pursued Spofford. "The treasure is to remain where it is, for the present, and whichever of you that wants a little change to keep you going until this thing blows over or something else turns up, can call upon Uncle Isaac, who will supply you with ready funds at his usual modest rate of interest, thirty-three and a third per cent. Now the next thing to be considered is the disposition of ourselves. You had all better take a trip somewhere for your health. I notice that city air is telling on all of you, especially my friend Murdoch here. He is actually growing hollow-eyed from arduous work and confinement. He needs mountain or sea air."

"Hollow bocketed, you mean," sneered the Jew. "Und as for air, s'elp me, Moshes, I'f been living on nutting but air for zix months."

"As for myself and Mr. Gamm here, we contemplate a brief run over the water. The season will soon open in Paris—delightful Paris, and my friend is never quite happy without a few weeks each year in the enchanting capital."

"Vile ve poor t'ieves v'at do der dirty vork shweat und shtarve in New York und run der risk uv sphending a few years on der Island."

"That's about the size of it," growled Madden, scowling darkly.

Spofford regarded the two grumblers, never for an instant relaxing his benevolent smile, and finally said in his most unctuous voice:

"It pains me, gentlemen—pains me sorely—to hear these murmurs of dissatisfaction. There is nothing that wounds the sympathetic and philanthropic heart so deeply as ingratitude. I would rather this moment yield up to you every cent I possess than to think that one of you entertain an unkindly or unthankful feeling toward me, after all I have done for you. But since you have driven me to it, I must speak. It breaks my heart to do it, but I feel that the time has come when I must speak. If I hear one word more of discontent on the part of any of you I shall that moment wash my hands of the whole of you, and you will not receive one penny of the accumulations of this club. This is my ultimatum, gentlemen."

With that the good gentleman arose preparatory to taking his leave.

But he was not done with the business, as he supposed.

He had ruled, czar-like, over these miserable wretches so long that he had come to consider them his slaves, as indeed they had been all these years, and that they had not an iota of spirit remaining.

But he had, even at this late day, misjudged them. Even the worm, if we may be allowed to use that threadbare axiom, will turn.

Madden and Murdoch, upon whom the burden of the boss's onus seemed to fall, sat sullen and grim, looking at each other, apparently mutely consulting each other as to which should be the first to break the chains of serfdom. At length, and it had only taken a few seconds, for the broker was still standing, working his gloves upon his dainty hands, they appeared to have arrived at a mutual understanding, and Madden arose from the table.

He was white and trembled slightly, but his face wore that expression of desperate determination which sometimes comes to the mean and dastardly when driven to the verge of despair.

"Mr. Spofford," he began, in a calm, deliberate tone, that made the broker start, "what you have proposed won't go. It won't go with me, and I know of some others it won't go with. We have stood your insolence and ill-treatment about long enough. It is time to call a halt. You talk of not being willing to hear any more of our murmuring. We say that we will hear no more of your hypocritical cant, and we will stand no more of

your tyranny. An equal division of the swag to-night—yes, this very instant—or the police will be in possession of the secret before to-morrow's sun!"

As he concluded his sentence he brought his fist down upon the table with a thunderous thump.

"Hear! hear!" shouted Murdoch. "D'em's my zentiments, you pet!"

Then there was silence.

It was an awful silence resembling that of the terrible hush as the thunderstorm lulls for a moment, only to prepare, apparently, for a fresh and more fearful outburst.

Madden had reseated himself at the table, filled and emptied a tumbler of raw spirits, and sat mute, white and grim as a marble statue.

Murdoch also sat silent, but there was nothing grim about his face. On the contrary, a half-mischievous, half-triumphant grin wreathed his red circular features, while he thrummed a nervous tattoo on the table with his fingers. Meanwhile he kept his eyes fixed upon the face of Madden.

The eyes of little Gamm and the old Jew wandered alternately from the face of Madden to that of Spofford, while the latter, cool and unruffled, still wearing his placid smile, calmly surveyed the ashen face of the daring rebel who had just delivered himself.

At length he spoke, in the same unctuous tone:

"So this is the state of affairs, is it? If I do not share the spoils at this very instant, you will peach, will you? You not only presume to dictate to me, your master, but you go to the length of threatening me. This is amusing, upon my word, it is absolutely amusing, gentlemen—or would be, if it were not so pitiful."

Here the good-humored gentleman was unable to repress a light little ripple of gleeful laughter.

Another silence followed, during which he still kept his eyes upon the face of Madden, who, in turn, never raised his eyes from the table at which he seemed to be staring.

At length the good man strode leisurely toward the table. When within a few inches of it, he leaned over, resting one hand on the table, and, shaking a single finger of the other hand close to the nose of the rebellious Madden, he said, in a deep, awful guttural:

"Young man, get down on your knees and ask my pardon!"

The cowering wretch hesitated, began to shiver as if he had been seized with an ague, stole one terrified glance up at the still smiling face towering over him, and then meekly, meanly, sank upon his knees and broke into a wild, inarticulate howl of groveling supplication.

Apparently satisfied with his work in this direction, the good man turned to mete out a similar punishment to the other rebel. But when he came to look for Murdoch, that wily gentleman was nowhere to be seen. He had taken time by the forelock and made his escape from the room.

Just at that instant a whirring noise was heard overhead, and one and all looked toward the ceiling.

A lever with a heavy balance on one end and attached to a bolt which ran up through the ceiling at the other, was seen to shoot upward.

"Great Heaven!" shrieked Spofford, losing his calmness for the first time. "Somebody is at the treasure! Every one to his duty, and the first one that shirks is a dead man!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A SURPRISE PARTY.

After feasting their eyes upon the glittering treasure as a whole for a few minutes, Thad and Hargrave proceeded to cull it over for the twofold purpose of ascertaining something near the value of the "find" and discovering, if possible, whether any of the young man's wealth was among it.

There were a number of small chamois and canvas bags filled with coin of various denominations, besides a heap of golden

eagles and double eagles stacked systematically in a corner.

In addition, there were a number of jewel-cases containing diamonds, rubies, sapphires and other precious stones.

Then came a number of packages, done up in strong paper, which the detective took for granted contained bank-bills, and lifted out without examining, and laid aside for future investigation.

Silently the two men worked, taking the parcels out, one by one, and laying them on the sandy floor.

All these objects were valuable and sources of joy from the very contact, but there was something else which they prized much more highly, and they felt certain it was to be found in this casket. It was the package of gold bars bearing the smelter's stamp, which would identify them as the property of young Hargrave.

At length the bottom of the casket was reached.

Along the bottom, in an even row, lay a quantity of gold bars.

Each man snatched up one eagerly and put it near the light to examine it.

The next instant there was a simultaneous exclamation from each.

"Here it is!"

And with one accord each pointed to the monogram on the end of the bar he had been examining.

"This is better luck than I figured on," observed Thad, delightedly. "The fact of your gold bars being in here is pretty good evidence that the rest of your wealth is also among this mass of treasure. So we will take the lot along."

They then proceeded to return the goods to the box.

Parcel after parcel was taken up and placed back, and the work went on as silently as the removal had done.

The removal of the treasure from the box had occupied but a few minutes, but from the deliberate manner in which they had begun on the returning of the goods to the casket, it would take a good deal longer.

Scarcely had they started upon their task when Thad stopped and cocked his ear.

"What is it?" queried Hargrave, greatly startled by the detective's action.

"Listen!" whispered Thad.

The Man from Mexico listened for a second, and sprang to his feet.

"Some one coming!" he said.

"Yes, and more than one of them. Prepare for the worst."

"Hh—h—h! we better shut the door?"

"No, we are better with it open. But I'll put out the light."

With which he shut off the flame of his lantern, leaving the cell in total darkness.

"Now let them come," whispered Thad.

They had drawn their revolvers and taken up their positions one on each side of the door.

Meanwhile the steady tramp of what appeared to be half a dozen men grew nearer and nearer every second.

The sound proceeded from the direction of the shanty, and it was evident the approaching party were coming through it.

A moment later the party arrived within a few feet of the door to the cell and paused.

"They are very quiet," whispered one of the crowd.

"Better strike a light," suggested another.

"Not for the world," whispered a third.

There was an interval of silence, and Thad heard some one fumbling about the door.

Then he heard some one whisper:

"They are in there, or have been—the door is open!"

"S—s—h!"

Then there was a dead silence, except for the cat-like tread of what appeared to be only one pair of feet.

This moved along with a scarcely audible sound, and Thad soon realized that the person was inside of the room, but still he did not make a motion.

The detective was a trifle perplexed what to do.

He had laid his plans as to the action he should take in case he could get the whole crowd inside. But as only one had entered he was undecided what move to make.

If he attacked the one who had entered, the others would come in upon him, and if he attempted to escape, which he might succeed in doing, he would lose all that it had cost him such an effort to gain—namely, the casket of treasure.

If he could only have communicated with his companion, he might have been able to formulate some concerted action, but he was on the opposite side of the door, and any move on his part to reach him would betray his presence.

But something must be done, and that quickly, and he resolved upon a plan.

The solitary individual who had entered the room could still be heard moving about apparently unable to get his bearings as to the lay of the room.

But presently he seemed to have got this straightened out in his head, for Thad heard him moving slowly and cautiously toward him.

He knew at once what was attracting the intruder in that direction—the treasure casket—and the detective stood perfectly still and held himself in readiness to receive the visitor.

He did not purpose using his revolver, as that would make a noise and alarm the others outside.

Still he stood there, scarcely breathing, and wondering the while what his young friend on the other side of the door was doing or thinking, and he could still hear the unknown visitor moving toward him with the gait of a tortoise and with such a velvety tread that, but for the occasional crunching of sand under his feet his progress would have been utterly noiseless.

And now he had arrived within a yard of the detective, and he could hear his breathing.

Thad braced himself, and swung his arm preparatory to delivering the visitor a telling blow as soon as the latter should take another step.

But just then something occurred to upset his plans.

The fellow stumbled over the jewel-casket and fell headlong into the detective's arms.

This was so unexpected that he was a trifle disconcerted for a moment, but it was only a moment when he had regained his presence of mind, and, hastily thrusting the pistol, which he still retained in his left hand, into his pocket out of the way, he clutched the man by the throat with both hands, and hurled him to the floor.

Quick as had been the action, however, the fellow had managed to let off one terrific yell for assistance, and the next instant the remaining crowd came rushing in.

But they did not find the hospitable reception that they may have looked for, for the first one that put his head in at the door received a stinger from the butt of Hargrave's revolver that sent him reeling to the floor, and the next one also received a blow, but apparently on some fleshy part of the body, for he only grunted and sprang back.

And the next instant a sharp report rang out and a bullet whizzed uncomfortably close to the young man's ear.

This was quickly responded to by a shot from Hargrave's pistol, and then followed a sharp fusillade of a dozen shots.

But it was all guesswork, and he had no means of knowing what execution he had done. Hargrave had received a scratch, and then the firing from the outside ceased, and to all appearances the attacking party had retreated.

Meanwhile Thad, after throwing his man to the floor, and after a sharp tussle with him, finally succeeded in getting the handcuffs on him.

The work had just been finished, and he had only risen to his feet, when Hargrave, having finished his work, turned his attention toward his friend.

As a consequence the two men ran together, and in an instant had clinched.

Thad, in attempting to get his man by the throat, had only succeeded in grasping his collar, and was struggling to get his hands upon his antagonist's windpipe, when the latter, in a fit of desperation, cried:

"Curse you! unhand me, or I'll bore you!"

"My God!" muttered Thad, relaxing his hold, "is that you, Hargrave?"

"For Heaven's sake! is that you, Ferguson?" gasped the Man from Mexico.

"It's what's left of me."

He had only whispered, but Thad clasped him by the arm and admonished him to silence.

Nevertheless, after groping about in the dark for a few moments, and coming near Hargrave again, he whispered:

"What has become of them all?"

"Gone, I think," answered the young man.

Thad flashed his light about the room, and, sure enough, nobody was to be seen.

Even the man whom Hargrave had floored had managed to make his escape.

Thad's man, whom he had handcuffed, had risen to a sitting posture, and was crouched, sullen and morose, in one corner of the cell.

Thad held the light down to his face, when, lo! it was none other than Murdoch!

"Hullo, Sheeny Mose!" he cried, laughing. "What are you doing here?"

The Jew cast a contemptuous glance up at the detective, and muttered:

"V'at I do here? Don't you vas got no eyes? V'at you t'ink I vas doing? Sawing vood or blaying a viddle? It petter vas you gets some spuckties by your eyes."

"Oh, well, Sheeny, don't lose your temper. I only meant to ask you how it happened that you, and none of the rest, dared to venture inside the room."

"D'at vas because Sheeny Mose vas a blamed fool, v'at? Haluf an hour ago I shwore d'at I would leaf d'at old hybergrit, und d'en I dakes me der lead in d'is peesness yoost to show mein prafery und get zolid mit der old rhinozzerous, und now v'at I get? I get der pracelets. Dat is der kind of a shoe-puckle I vas."

At that moment Thad moved his light to the point where the casket sat on the floor, and the Jew, following it with his eyes, uttered an exclamation of surprise and delight.

"Oh, mein cracious! Yoost look by d'at!"

"Wouldn't you like to get your fingers into it, Sheeny?" asked the detective, laughing.

"Oh, you pet my life I would!"

"Well, you are in for it now, suppose I divide with you, would you be willing to split on the rest of the gang?"

"You pet I would, und it wouldn't take much, eider."

"How much, say?"

"Oh, yoost enough to dake me out of der goundry, somev'ere v'ere d'at sooundrel wouldn't find me."

"To whom do you refer?"

The Jew glanced about him with a scared look, and finally answered:

"I d'ink it vas petter ve wait till ve gets somev'ere else before I dell you some-d'ings."

"You needn't be afraid to speak. There is nobody near."

"I don't know 'bout d'at. D'at veller has ears like a mouse, he can hear v'en you don't say nottings."

"Very well, then, I'll take you to a place where there will be on risk in speaking. Come, Hargrave, let us gather up this plunder and get out of here."

The old Shylock stared at the man addressed, and finally exclaimed:

"Vas? You don't mean d'at d'at vas old Hargrave?"

But the two men were too busy with their work just then to pay any attention to the Jew.

The treasure was finally got back into the casket, and the two men arose to their feet, when the sound of approaching footsteps caused them to start and peer out into the darkness.

CHAPTER XV.

A CHANGE OF BASE.

Murdoch heard the approaching footsteps almost as soon as the detective, and grew livid with terror.

"Don't let d'em take me!" he pleaded. "If d'ey gets me in d'eir glitches dey'll kill me! Don't, for der lofe of mercy, led d'em get holdt of me!"

"Keep quiet, you coward!" muttered

Thad, turning upon the cringing wretch with a scowl. "You shall not be taken if I can help it; but I can't tell how matters will end."

"Ef you would loose mein hands I would helup meinseluf."

"I've no doubt," sneered Thad, "and help the enemy too."

"Oh, I shwear d'at I will only helup you. V'y should I durn against you, who vas going to gif me a shance to durn State's eidence? I wouldn't do it."

Thad thought rapidly.

There was a tone of sincerity in the fellow's speech, and it was true that he had more to gain by standing by the detective than by his former friends.

If he proved true, there was one more fighting man on his side, and if he turned traitor he would have but one more against him.

There was not a second to be lost, for the men were rapidly approaching, and from the sound of their footsteps it was evident that they had recruited their numbers since their late attack and retreat.

"I will release you," whispered Thad, "and trust to your loyalty, and if you betray me you are a dead man."

With that he whipped off the handcuffs.

"Are you armed?"

"Of course. You don't subbose I would come in here as I did mitoudt arms?"

"S—s—h! Here they are!"

The three men sprang behind the jamb of the door, two on one side and one on the other and not an instant too soon, for the new-comers had filed up in front of the door, and instantly fired a volley in at the open door.

Quick as a flash the three men stepped from their concealment and responded with a shot apiece.

It should have been mentioned that the detective had turned out the light upon restoring Murdoch to liberty, and consequently the place was in darkness.

This gave him and his companions a decided advantage over their assailants, as the latter could never be sure about their mark.

The instant the three men fired they jumped back into shelter, so that the volley that followed from the outside crashed harmlessly past them and rattled on the opposite wall.

Instantly following this, Thad and his comrades sprang out, fired, and sprang back again.

It was evident that each shot had done some execution, for a howl of pain went up on each occasion, and the attacking party were waxing more furious and determined every minute.

There was no chance for routing the entrenched trio while their ammunition held out, but that very point was at that moment causing Thad a good deal of concern.

He had already fired six of the twelve shots contained in his two revolvers, and three more rounds would exhaust him, while he remembered that Hargrave had spent some of his in the previous fight.

For a minute or so more the alternate volleys continued, and then the calamity which Thad had anticipated came.

His comrades, as well as himself, found themselves without ammunition for another shot.

A deathly silence followed the last volley from the outside, and then the attacking party knew why there was no response from within, and a shout of triumph went up.

"Charge in upon them!" shouted a stern voice.

And this was followed by another outburst.

Hitherto Hargrave and Murdoch had been on one side and the detective on the other, but when his last shot had been spent, Thad sprang across the open door and joined his comrades.

"Now, boys," he whispered, "it is for your lives. Have you knives, each of you?"

"I haf, you pet," responded the Jew.

"I have a knife," added Hargrave.

"And so have I. Now let us prepare to use them, and sell our lives as dearly as possible. It is our last hope."

And then, as by an inspiration, Thad

sprang and grasped the door and hurled it to.

"Here, boys," he whispered, hoarsely, "throw your weight against the door."

The other two men sprang to the door and planted their shoulders against it.

"Dere's an extra par do but agross it, if ve could find it," whispered the Jew.

But it was too late to look for anything of the kind now. The men without had already begun to surge against the door, and it was only a matter of time and endurance before they would overcome with their superior numbers the small party holding the door, burst in and win the victory, unless our friends did some extraordinary fighting with their knives.

The attacking party had thrown their tremendous weight against the barrier the second time, and it was all our friends could do to resist the terrible onslaught.

But just as they were recovering for a third attack, Thad was favored with a bright idea.

He remembered the crowbar which he had used and thrown down some time before, and, at the risk of losing the fight by leaving the door in the hands of his two companions, he sprang the slide of his lantern, flashed the light about the floor, espied the crowbar, and picked it up.

In another second he had jammed the sharp end down into a crevice of the stone floor and braced the other end against an iron flange that bound the ponderous door.

Having done this, he wiped the perspiration from his reeking brow, smiled, and said:

"Now, boys, I reckon you may take a breath. It will give those gents a little exercise to break that fellow."

And he had got the brace set not a moment too soon, for the next instant the crowd came against the door with the fury of a battering ram, but the brace did not budge.

Evidently the party outside mistrusted that some new deal had been sprung on them, for after this onslaught there was a cessation of hostilities for some moments, during which there was heard a lively discussion, mingled with fearful oaths.

Presently, however, they appeared to have made up their minds to make another effort, and the sounding thud struck the door once more, causing it to shiver and groan, but there was no more indication of its yielding than before.

This was the occasion of an unearthly outbreak.

Thad had seldom heard such oaths and imprecations.

At this moment he took occasion to glance at his two companions, for the light still shone, and he could not repress a smile at the expression of the Jew.

His round, red face was a perfect cluster of triumphant smiles, and when the detective's eye met his the fellow winked, nodded his head, and chuckled:

"I guess der old man vas sheekmated for vonce in his life, ain't it?"

"That is better than holding the door with our shoulders, eh, Sheeny?" laughed Thad.

"You pet my life. A huntspige vas besser as a toor-prace d'an a Sheeny any tay."

But our friends waited in vain for another attack upon the door.

Even the talking had ceased, and when they listened there was not the sound of a human being to be heard.

"What can it mean?" muttered Thad. "Can it be that they have abandoned the siege, or have they merely withdrawn to hatch some new plot by which they hope to win?"

"D'ot vas ldt," responded the Jew, growing serious. "You pet my life dot Spof—I mean d'ot old poss don't vas gif up so soon. He vill sthick d'ere till der lasht dog vas deat. Oh, Moshes!" he broke off, suddenly.

Some painful recollection had evidently come to him, for he went on:

"D'ot feller vill sthay d'ere till ve was all stharvel vas?"

But the detective was too much intent upon discovering the movements of the enemy outside to listen to the Jew's wallings.

Thus far all had been silent, but at length he heard, or imagined he heard, a soft shuffling of feet, and later whispering.

He thought this might be all imagination at first, or perhaps the wind sighing through the shingles of the shanty beyond.

But pretty soon he was convinced that there was something real about his conjecture.

An audible sound, as of some one throwing something against the door, was heard.

He had his ear to the door, and his two companions, seeing his attitude, guessed that there was something going on, and followed his example.

Just then there was a repetition of the rattling sound.

Murdoch glanced at the detective, and his face was full of terrified anticipation.

"You know v'ot d'ot vas?" questioned the Jew.

"No."

"I do."

Murdoch's face had grown ashy white with terror, and he began to tremble violently.

"What is it, Sheeny?"

"It vas gindling vood."

"What?"

Thad began to feel a trifle anxious now, more out of sympathy with the Jew than from any real anticipation on his own part however.

"Gindling vood," repeated Murdoch, his teeth chattering as he spoke now.

Thad realized the worst now.

"You don't mean to say—"

"Yes," interrupted the Jew, shaking from head to foot, "d'ey are brebaring to puilt a fire against der toor und roast us out."

"My God!" gasped Hargrave, in agony. "Is it possible that they are such fiends?"

"Yes, yes! D'ey do more as d'ot if d'ey git a shance. D'ey not only purn der toor—py shimminy, d'ey purn us alive!"

Still the detective remained cool and passive.

"They will first have to get the chance before they perform the latter operation," he said, in a musing tone, as if addressing himself. "And it will be some time before they get the opportunity, even if they do burn the doorway. We still have our knives, and we will not, I trust, forget that we are men."

This had the effect of instilling new courage into Hargrave, who responded:

"Yes, they can do no more than kill us, and while they are at it, we will cause a little mourning in some of their families."

But the Jew was past encouragement. White and dejected, he stood with his eyes fixed on the door as he might have done the scaffold or the block.

Thad still listened with his ear against the door.

At length a crackling sound, warned him that the Jew's prophecy had been only too true, and that the door was already aflame.

He stole another glance at his companions, and now found Murdoch on his knees, while Hargrave was a picture of dejection and fear.

Catching the young man's eye, Thad smiled encouragingly, and said in a cheerful voice:

"Brace up, old fellow. There is still hope. This is not a flea-bite to what I have passed through, and always come out alive. Take another twist on your nerve and be a man. And as for you, Sheeny, you miserable coward! get up from there, or, by George! I'll stick a knife into you!"

Mose scrambled to his feet, apparently willing to take his chances with the party outside rather than encounter Thad's blade.

At length the flames began to eat through the stout oaken boards, and in another minute the ponderous door would fall in a mass of embers.

CHAPTER XVI. DEFEAT.

It looked as if it were all up with the detective and his comrades.

The smoke from the burning door was rapidly filling the room, from which there was no outlet for it, and it was only a matter of time when they would be suffocated.

Thad realized this almost at once, and whispered to Hargrave and the Jew:

"Lie down. The smoke never falls nearer than two feet of the floor."

And the three men lay down upon the stone floor.

But even here the air was pent, and it was exceedingly difficult to breathe.

They remained silent for some seconds, and then the young man ventured, in a low, tremulous voice:

"It looks pretty blue for us, Mr. Burr."

"Yes, just a trifle, but it is nothing to what I have passed through. Keep up your courage, my boy. We shall come out of this all right and live to laugh about it."

"I hope so," murmured the Man from Mexico, hopelessly.

Meanwhile the door was rapidly being consumed by the hungry flame, and the cell growing fuller and fuller of the suffocating smoke.

The sound of the men's voices could be distinctly heard outside above the roaring flames.

And the tone had somewhat changed.

Whereas there had appeared a good deal of discord and general bad humor a while ago, there was a ring of triumph now, interspersed with which were occasional peals of laughter.

"They seem to enjoy it," muttered Hargrave, bitterly.

"No doubt; but perhaps we may turn the tables on them before we are through with them."

Hargrave sighed heavily, and murmured, in a despairing tone:

"I hope so."

At that moment a large section of the charred door fell, still blazing, to the floor.

It fell directly upon the Jew, who had remained silent all this time.

Whether he was burned or only frightened, he jumped to his feet with a yell.

This appeared to delight the attacking party, for they indulged in a loud shriek of laughter.

"You vill laugh at a dying man, vill you?" muttered Murdoch, although half choked with the smoke.

With that he snatched the crowbar away from the door, with the probable intention of using it, in his half-crazy state, as a weapon against the enemy.

But the moment the implement was removed the upper half of the flaming door fell in with a crash, almost on top of Thad and Hargrave.

Both were on their feet instantly.

And they were not a second too soon.

The crowd outside apparently understood what had happened, for they rushed against the remaining fragment of the door, hurling it open.

A volume of flame and smoke rushed in with the air from the outside, and it was only through the greatest activity on the part of Thad and Hargrave that they were not scorched to death.

As for the Jew, he had apparently anticipated something of the kind, for he had jumped behind the jamb at one side of the door in time to escape danger.

And then, as soon as the door had been hurled open, he was also prepared for that, it seemed, for with the quickness of thought, he jumped from his place of concealment, sprang through the door, knife in hand, and the next instant there was a howl of agony among the crowd outside.

It had all happened in the fraction of a second, and before Thad had time to realize what was about to happen, the fellow was gone.

Whether he had cleared the way for his flight by felling one of the gang, or simply rejoined his old comrades, Thad was in a quandary to comprehend; but he saw that if the former was the case it was a good example to follow.

He clutched the arm of Hargrave.

"Follow the Jew's example," he whispered in his ear. "It is our only chance."

And suiting the action to the word, he made a spring through the roaring flame.

His bowie knife was tightly clasped in his hand, and he struck out furiously at random as he landed on his feet outside the door.

But he only swept the empty air.

Nothing, animate or inanimate, came in the way of his deadly blade, but he did not pause just then to investigate the cause, but kept straight on his course at a rapid run.

Through some miracle he succeeded in making his way through the plunder-strewn shanty without difficulty, and soon found himself on the rocks in front of the hut.

Then he stopped to consider what was best to be done.

First of all he wondered what had become of Murdoch, and then he considered the fate of poor Hargrave.

Would he succeed in making his escape, or fall by the hands of the assassins?

Thad waited.

If the young man did not soon appear he must return and endeavor to rescue him.

The gray streaks of dawn were just breaking through the somber veil of waning night away across the Hudson yonder, and a fresh breeze had sprung up.

The detective took off his heavy sombrero and allowed the cooling breath of morning to fan his fevered brow.

But he did not tarry in that position long.

Duty, which never at any time allowed him to rest, prodded him and bade him get to work.

His young companion had not yet appeared, and he must be rescued, if he had fallen into the hands of the gang.

He put on his hat and turned toward the door of the shanty.

But at that moment his action was arrested by the sound of the gang coming through the shanty.

He felt that it would be folly to attempt to cope with them single handed and unarmed except for his knife.

Oh, how he wished for a couple of loaded revolvers.

Those in his pockets, it will be remembered, were empty, and he had no time to reload them.

Meanwhile, the gang was rapidly approaching.

They would soon emerge from the cabin. It was now sufficiently light for them to see him the moment they stepped into the air.

He must either conceal himself there somewhere or beat a hasty retreat.

He was not willing to do the latter, so the former was decided upon.

As we have seen, the yard was strewn with boxes and barrels.

Choosing one of the former, the detective crouched down behind it.

Not an instant too soon was he in position, either, for a second later the foremost of the gang emerged from the front door.

From his position behind the box Thad could discern the faces of the men as they filed out of the hut, and he studied them closely, but, with the exception of Madden, he did not recognize any of them.

Either they were disguised or they were all strangers to him.

He looked in vain for Murdoch among them, and also expected to see his friend Hargrave, but neither was there.

As the last two men came forth, Thad saw that they carried something between them, and was not long in discerning that it was the iron casket.

He wondered whether the men had had time to gather up all the treasure and replace it in the box.

It did not seem likely, in the short time which had elapsed from the moment of his escape from the cell to the time the men came out of the cabin.

The men filed out and down the steps to the street, and Thad saw that there were eight of them by actual count.

He expected to see them turn into some tunnel or entrance leading into the underground apartment beneath the rocky cell from which he had escaped, but instead of that they crossed the street and stopped beneath the thick shadow of the bluff over there.

The spot was so dark that he could scarcely discern the group, and if he had

not seen them stop there it is more than likely that he would not have noticed them.

What could be their motive in stopping there? he mused.

He would have liked to have watched their movements, but the recollection of his companion came to him at that moment, and he resolved to sacrifice the opportunity of watching the gang and probably shadowing them to some other rendezvous rather than leave his friend in the lurch.

So he emerged from his hiding place, entered the shanty and made his way back to the mouth of the cell.

All was quiet and dark here now.

The fire had burnt itself out, and only a few embers were smoldering of the late ponderous door.

Thad put his head inside the cell and tried to peer into the dark interior, but the gloom was impenetrable as it had been at midnight.

Unfortunately, he had dropped his lantern inside, but he fumbled in his pockets for a match, finally found one and struck it.

He held the blazing match above his head and surveyed the interior of the cell.

The smoke had only partially cleared away, and hung, for the most part, in a dark, murky cloud about the ceiling.

Beyond this there was nothing in sight.

But when he lowered the light to the floor, he espied his lantern and the crowbar.

The detective picked up his lantern and relighted it, and then began a search of the premises.

A dagger and a pistol, probably dropped by either Hargrave or the Jew, lay on the floor, and there were a number of clots of blood intermingled with the cinders of the cremated door, and that was all.

Every article which had been taken from the casket had been removed.

But this was not the cause of his greatest anxiety.

What had become of Hargrave?

How had he been so mysteriously and completely spirited away in so brief a time?

And the most puzzling part of it was, that the young man had not appeared among the gang as they emerged from the shanty, so that he must still be concealed about the place.

But where? There did not appear to be any place where a human being, dead or alive, could be secreted.

Nor did it seem that the gang could have had time to put him out of the way and secrete the body in the short space of time that had elapsed after the detective's escape.

Carefully he went over every inch of the rocky cell once more, but with very little hope from the outset of finding what he sought.

There must, he thought, be some means of communication between the cell and the apartment below—some trap or secret passage, by which the unfortunate young man had been suddenly dropped below.

But, fatigued and half dead from his long and arduous labor, and recollecting his previous fruitless search for something of this character, the detective did not feel inclined to renew the investigation.

Then he thought of the shanty, with its heaps of rubbish, and considered that it would have been a simple matter for them, after shooting or stabbing the young man, to have tossed his body among this rubbish and pulled some of it over the remains.

So he returned to the shanty, flashed the light of his lantern about, and discovering nothing, set to overhauling the heaps of plunder.

But after wasting an hour at this occupation he grew discouraged.

At the same time a new light broke upon him.

Returning to the door of the cell, he examined the ground for blood-marks. There were plenty of them, but they led off nowhere.

This seemed to settle it. If the young man had been killed and either dragged

or carried away, there would have been a trail of blood.

Disheartened at last, he concluded to leave the place for the present, and started for the front door, and just as he reached it, he met Sheeny Mose.

CHAPTER XVII.

GROPING IN MYSTERY.

The surprise was mutual, although, so far as the Jew was concerned, he did not recognize the detective, not having had a sight of him during all the time they were together in the cell, and never having seen him on any previous occasion in his present disguise.

Murdoch therefore stopped short and stared at the detective, until the latter spoke:

"Hullo, Sheeny! Where have you been?"

"Yoost aroundt der gorner," replied the Jew, recognizing Thad's voice.

"Around the corner?"

"Yaw."

"What did you do that for?"

"Vell, you see, v'en I got owit of d'at cage I vas mos' roasted und mein t'roat was like a lime-kiln, so I vent me quivick around der gorner for a cooler. How you vas got owit, sir?"

"By the same process that you did, Sheeny, but I didn't have the luck to stick any one with my knife as you did."

"Do stig anypoty mit mein knife?"

"Yes; didn't you strike some one with your dagger as you jumped through the burning door?"

"Not py a small measure, mein friendt. I don't vas got no dime yoost then for stiggung beoples; all I vas t'ought of vas running, und der class bier. Vas?"

"Who was that that yelled, then?"

"Oh, d'at vas meinselef."

"Why did you yell?"

"One of d'em fellers basted me von in der nosh und I yell."

"Have you been about here since?"

"Nein."

"You do not know what has become of Hargrave, then?"

"Nein. Hargrave vas with you v'en I left."

"I know he was, but when I made my escape and expected him to follow, he did not do so, it seems."

The Jew indulged in his peculiar chuckle.

"Maype der growd dook him along," he suggested.

"That was what I thought, but I saw the crowd leave the shanty, and he was not with them."

And this reminded the detective of the gang having stopped across the way, but when he looked in the direction they were nowhere to be seen.

"In d'at gase," said Murdoch, "d'ey've probably put him owit of der vay."

"But where could they have hidden his body?"

"Oh, d'ere vas blendy of blaces to hide der pody," rejoined Mose, with his knowing chuckle.

Thinking the fellow might know of some hiding place which had escaped him, Thad said:

"Well, perhaps you can find the place?"

"Berhaps."

And the two entered the hut, Murdoch taking the lead, and were soon back to the entrance of the stone cell.

The Jew nosed about for some time, went inside the cell, poked about, and came out again, and began searching through the piles of plunder, Thad lighting him with his lantern wherever he went.

"Idt vas funny," he mused, at last, stopping and putting his finger to his nose. "I t'ought he would be lying aboutt here somev'ere."

Thad lost his patience at this vital admission of failure.

"Do you know of no place—no secret cell or apartment, where they would be likely to stow a body?" he demanded, impatiently.

"Nein—onless—"

Here he broke off, put his finger to the side of his corpulent nose and winked.

"Well?" demanded Thad.

"Der blace down pelow."
 "The room underneath the cell?"
 "Yaw. How you know 'bout d'at?"
 "Never mind. Do you think he might have been put down there?"

"Maype."
 "Then there must be some connection between that room and the cell here."
 "No, d'ere vas no gonnegshuns."
 "How would they get the body down there then?"

"Garry it 'round der other vay."
 "Very well, show me the way."
 Murdoch hesitated a moment, and then strode away to one corner of the shanty, and was closely followed by the detective.

But no sooner had the Jew arrived there than he appeared to change his mind, for he turned about abruptly and said:

"I vonder v'ere d'at old Chew vas gone? Vas?"

"Never mind the old Jew," retorted Thad, sharply. "If you know of any way of getting to the other room, show it to me, and be quick about it."

"Oh, I show you—but—"

"But what?"

"I don't think I gan vind it."

Meanwhile he kept his eyes moving about in every direction, and was evidently growing nervous.

Thad noticed his hesitation and guessed at its cause.

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

"Oh, no, no, I vas not afraid, but—"

"I see, you are afraid of the old man. Well, let me tell you you need have no fear on that score, for if the old man is about, which I doubt, he will not dare to interfere with you."

"Not v'ile you vas here but—"

"And when I go you will go with me, so that there is no danger of either the old man or any of his gang molesting you."

"You vill sthand py me d'en?"

"To the last. I was never known to desert an ally in my whole career."

The Jew appeared satisfied at this, and turned toward the corner of the shanty again.

In the corner, close to the wall, was an immense bundle which looked as if it might be a collection of old clothes.

This the Jew grasped, and, with a good deal of effort, dragged away from the corner.

Thad then saw that the bundle concealed a trap-door similar to that used over cellars.

Without another word the Jew grasped the handle of the door and raised it, revealing a short flight of rude steps.

Then turning to the detective, he silently motioned him to follow, and began the descent of the stairs.

At the bottom of the stairs there was a short passage which ran along between the face of the cliff and the soft earth forming the embankment between it and the street.

The passage received no light from the outside, and was consequently both dark and damp.

But Thad threw the light of his lantern along the passage, and the Jew strode away at a rapid pace and soon stopped before a door.

At this he knocked, giving the cabalistic knock peculiar to the crooked fraternity, but there was no response, and he repeated it.

There was still no response, and, after repeating the summons a number of times, with the same result, he tried the latch and found the door unlocked.

But instead of opening the door, the fellow turned to the detective as an indication that he would rather have the latter venture in first.

Thad took the hint, pushed the door open, and walked in.

The apartment was fully as dark as either the passage or the cell above, but he lighted it up to some degree with his lantern, and looked.

There were a table and a number of chairs, and no other furniture to speak of.

On the table stood a number of bottles, some empty and others only partly full, and a number of glasses, pipes and a box of tobacco.

The atmosphere of the apartment was heavy with the stale fumes of tobacco and liquor.

His eyes falling upon the table and its contents again, he said, laughingly:

"They have evidently been enjoying themselves, anyway."

"Yes, v'en der poys gets tergedder d'ey shenerally enshoys d'eirselef," laughed the Jew.

"But we do not appear to have accomplished anything by coming down here, after all."

The Jew was silent, and set to looking about the room, as if in hope of discovering something.

"There is no other secret apartment, is there?" questioned the detective.

"No, d'at vas all."

"You are sure?"

"Oh, I dell you der trut', mein friendt."

"Then it is evident that Hargrave, dead or alive, is not about here. Let us go."

The Jew turned toward the door and Thad was following him with the light.

As he passed the table he flashed his light about it once more and then upon the floor.

Underneath the table he espied an envelope, half covered with the sand of the floor.

He picked it up and saw that it was directed to Manton Hargrave, Belcher Canyon, New Mexico.

In the upper left-hand corner of the envelope was printed the card of Spofford & Gamm, Brokers, Wall Street, New York.

There was a letter inclosed, but the detective did not take time to take it out for perusal just then, and put the envelope into his pocket.

When he had done so and looked up, he found the Jew watching him closely.

The fellow grinned, and asked:

"V'at you vind, mein friendt?"

"It has the appearance of a letter," replied Thad, dryly.

"I pet I know whose it vas."

"Possibly you do."

"It vas from old—"

He hesitated and grew very red.

"Spit it out. Who is it from, Sheeny?"

"Vell, it vas to Hargrave, anyway."

"You are right in that, but how did you know it was for him?"

"Oh, I've seen it in his pozzezion."

"Hargrave has had it in his possession, then?"

"Zerdainly."

"When and where did you see him with it?"

"At der St. Cheorge Hotel, in Brooklyn, already."

"When?"

"Der fery tay of der roppery."

"How do you know it is the same letter?"

"Because—because—I seen it—"

"Saw it where?"

"Here."

"Who had it?"

"Der poss."

"Whom do you call the boss, old Uucle Ikey?"

"Nein! he vas not der poss."

"Well, who is?"

The Jew hesitated and grew very nervous.

"Oh, mein friendt!" he implored at last, "dond't gombel me to dell v'ile ve are here. V'en ve are some blace else—any blace but this—I'll dell you."

"Very well, we'll wait until then; but how came the letter in the boss's possession?"

"I gift it do him."

"Stole it from Hargrave and gave it to the boss, eh?"

"Yaw."

"What was the object of that?"

"Der poss vas afraid Hargrave would use it in evidence against him. It would be a dead gif-avay. Vas?"

"Well, let us go."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A TOUGH WITNESS.

Still impressed with the idea that the Man from Mexico was concealed on the premises, either as a prisoner, or dead, the

detective prepared to quit the place with no small reluctance.

And yet he had exhausted his last resources, and apparently those of the Jew, who knew, or ought to have known, every nook and corner of the resort, and there appeared to be nothing more to be done.

As they passed near the door of the cell after ascending from the chamber underneath, the Israelite stopped suddenly and exclaimed:

"Oh, der shwvag! Ve petter dake d'at along. Nischt?"

"No, we won't bother about that," rejoined Thad, dryly.

"V'y not? Der cang vill get idt."

"They have already taken care of that, Sheeny."

The Jew gave him a queer look, half doubtful and half amused, that caused the detective to suspect for the first time that he was not to be trusted as far as he had given him credit for.

However, he said nothing, and the two passed on out of the shanty and into the street.

The sun was high in the heavens when they reached the elevated station, and as they were taking the train, Murdoch asked:

"V'ere you go?"

Up to that moment Thad had not thought about where he would take his prisoner (which he really was, although he had become his ally to a certain extent), and would probably have unconsciously taken him to his own home, had not the fellow brought the matter to his mind at this moment.

But now that he came to consider the question, he was prompt in deciding in his own mind that it would not do to trust the Jew so far as that. So, after a moment's reflection, he answered:

"We'll get some breakfast, for the first thing."

"Ah, d'at vas v'at yours drooly vishes apofe all d'ings," cried the Jew, with a watery mouth. "I dond't t'ink I efer vas so hunery since der dime I vas gombelled to hite in a sewer for dwenty-four hours mit nudding to eat but a backage of cigarettes und a revolver."

"You don't mean to say you ate either the cigarettes or the revolver?"

"Oh, nein, I dond't vas eat d'em, but if I could I would."

A short silence ensued, and then the Jew, who appeared very anxious about something, asked:

"V'at d'en?"

"We shall see."

"You dond't vas going to dake me to brison. Vas?"

"That depends," replied Thad, dryly.

"Yaw."

"I mean it depends upon how you conduct yourself."

"In vich way, mein friendt?"

"Whether you unabosom yourself to me as I think you should."

"Gif' avay all der segrets of der cang?"

"That is it. At least such of them as I shall see fit to ask you to reveal."

Murdoch made no reply, but Thad could see by the expression of his face that he hesitated on that point.

"Don't you think you can do it?"

The Jew shrugged his shoulders, smiled regretfully, and finally answered:

"V'ot I get out of it?"

"Well, if I find that what you shall tell me is correct, and through your information I am able to establish a tangible clew to the perpetrators of this robbery and their whereabouts, I shall turn you over to the Superintendent of Police, with a statement of the service you have rendered the State."

"Yaw."

And the fellow's jaw dropped.

"In which case you will have a formal trial or examination, which I have no doubt will result in acquittal," pursued the detective.

The Jew shrugged again and frowned.

"D'at vas great satisfagshuns," he grunted. "D'ere vill pe der satisfaction of gedding indo der hands of Domny Pynes, das ish all."

"An old acquaintance of yours, I take it."

"You pet!"

"And I have no doubt he will be delighted to see you."

"You yoost pet your life he vill be glatter to see me d'an I am do see him," growled the fellow, ill-naturedly.

"Has he anything in for you, Sheeny?"

Murdoch scowled darkly and was silent for some moments. At length he answered:

"Vell, d'at vas a bersonal matter, but I'll dell you v'at, Mister Detective, if d'at vas der gondishuns, Sheeny Mose dells mud-dings."

"What do you gain by that? You will be locked up and tried anyway, and without the condoning influence of State's evidence on your side, you are pretty sure to go over the road."

"I go ofer der roat anyva if the superintendent gets his nippers on me."

Thad was in a quandary.

It was evident the fellow would not open his mouth without the promise of complete immunity, and that he was reluctant to give.

He was eager, on the other hand, for the information which the fellow doubtless had in his power to impart, but should the detective promise to set him at liberty in consideration of this information, there was no guarantee that he would tell the truth, and this would not be ascertained, in all likelihood, until after the fellow was beyond reach.

After ruminating the subject pretty thoroughly, he finally said:

"I presume that nothing will do you but to be set at liberty in return for the information which you will furnish?"

"D'at's right," answered Murdoch, brightening up with fresh hope.

"But how can I depend that what you tell me is the truth?"

"Oh, I vill shwear to d'at."

"That is no guarantee, Sheeny," laughed Thad. "You ought to know that I wouldn't take your oath any quicker than your simple word."

"D'at's der disobfantage of peing a t'ief," murmured the fellow, bitterly. "V'at I do?"

"There is but one of two things to be done."

"V'at ish d'at?"

"You must either tell me the whole truth, and allow yourself to be held pending an investigation to determine whether what you shall state has been the truth, or I shall lock you up on a charge of complicity in the robbery, and the murder of Hargrave, in the event of it transpiring that he has been murdered. Of course, in the latter case, you will still have the opportunity of turning State's evidence, but you will also stand the same chance of falling into your old enemy's clutches as in the former case."

"But couldn't you hold me, without leading old Pyrrus know anyd'ing about it?"

"No; I have no means or authority for holding you, and if I had I would be laying myself liable for doing it."

The poor Jew was in a sad dilemma.

There was not a shadow of hope in either direction, and he was in despair.

After a long and reflective silence, however, he seemed to have been blessed with an inspiration, for his features lighted up and he said:

"I haf' it."

"Well?"

"You haf' found me faithful so long as I vas with you, nischt?"

"Yes, you have shown yourself to be tolerably faithful, so far as I know, although I still suspect that you might have shown me more in connection with the resort and fence out yonder if you had chosen to do so. I still suspect that you might have told me where Hargrave was to be found, had you chosen."

The fellow was in despair again.

"Yoost my luck," he moaned. "If I vasn't a t'ief you would belief me. Mein Gott! how can I make you understand d'ot I tell you der trut? If I shwear it, you vill not dake mein oat, und I haf no vittnesses. V'at I can say? It ish mein vish do act square for once in mein life, und if I did not dell you der trut' d'at dime, I hope I may pe hanged like a tog!"

There could be no question about the poor fellow's sincerity this time. The tears were streaming from his eyes.

Unmitigated scoundrel and thief as he was, Thad knew too much of human nature not to know that he was incapable of dissimulation to such perfection.

He was touched in spite of his effort at sternness.

"Well," he said at last, in a kindlier tone, "for once I will take your word, Sheeny. I believe you told me the truth with regard to not knowing where Hargrave was. Now what were you about to say about your faithfulness?"

"I vas apout do say that you hat vound me faithful v'ile I vas with you. I shtood my ground und vas reaty to vight mit you und Harerafe. Vas?"

"So you did, or appeared to. I cannot tell what you would have done if it had come to a fight. But let that pass. I will take it for granted that your expressed desire to be my ally was sincere. Go on."

"Der fery vact of my goming pack, und not attempting to run away v'en I saw you, ought to brove d'at."

"So it does, in a measure. Well?"

"Vell, as I vas fait'ful d'en, v'y can't you drust me again?"

"To the length of turning you at liberty on the strength of your peaching on your pals?"

"Nein! As your ally. Keeb me cloze do you; led me pe your vriend, led me fight vor you, die vor you, if need it vas; helup you in dis case. Can you not drust me, t'ief and schundrel as I am?"

This was too much for the soft-hearted detective, and he was prone to yield.

"Sheeny," he began, turning in his seat toward the imploring Jew, "I am going to do something that I have rarely done in my life—I am going to trust you. If you prove faithful to your obligations you shall not only have immunity from arrest, but you shall be rewarded for your fidelity; but if you prove false, this universe is not large enough for you to find a hiding place in it from me!"

Sheeny had another copious visitation of tears, and he grasped the detective's hand convulsively as he cried:

"Gott pless you! You vill nefer haf' occasion to regret der gonfidence you have but in me, und do show my gratitude, as soon as ve are v're idt vill pe safe you shall know all der segrets of der gang."

Soon afterward they reached their destination, a small eating-house on the eWst Side, and, as Thad was well acquainted with the proprietor, he let him know who he was without his disguise, and asked to be given a private dining-room, and ordered breakfast at the same time.

No further allusion was made to the confession and revelation until breakfast was despatched, of which the Jew partook with an appetite that bore out the truth of his assertion with regard to being hungry, and when he was fully satisfied, Thad arose and locked the door, and, returning to his seat, began:

"Now we can talk without fear of interruption. Tell me your story. Begin with telling me who the leader of this gang is, and who some of its prominent members are."

The Jew reflected a moment, and it was clear that even now he had a repugnance or dread of revealing the first fact, which wellnigh equaled the signing of his own death warrant.

But at length he began, in a weak, trembling tone:

"I vish I didn't haf' to tell d'at bart of it."

"Who the leader is?"

"Yes."

"Why do you have such a dread of that?"

"Begause, in der first blace, I have shworn never do divulge it, und in der secondt blace, I know d'at if it is efer found owit by der rest of der cang, d'ey vill zeek me owit to der ends of der eart."

"But what you will divulge aside from that will be equally as bad in the eyes of your confederates."

"No, not so pab as d'at."

Thad reflected. It was hard to force so

loyal /a man to become disloyal, even though that loyalty meant criminality. Besides, was not this loyalty a guarantee in a measure of the fellow's loyalty to Thad?

He drew the letter he had found on the floor in the resort and glanced it over hastily. Then, returning it to his pocket, he said:

"You may go on, omitting the name of the leader."

CHAPTER XIX.

SOME REVELATIONS.

The light of hope shone once more in the Jew's features at Thad's concession, and he said, in a cheerful tone:

"I gan go on, now, mit a better heardt."

"I hope so," said the detective, encouragingly.

After another short silence, Murdoch resumed:

"Apout dwo years aco I vas arrested, for a purglary. Der gase vas glear against me, und d'ere vas no doubts but I vould haf' gone ofer der roat for a long derm."

"I vas gommited to der Dombs do avait drial, und v'ile d'ere von day a shendleman came do der zell und vished do speak mit me. Ve hat a long dalk, v'ich ended vith der shendleman bromising to go pail for me, brovided I vould do certain t'ings for him. I vas anxious do get out of brison vonce more, und bromised to do anyt'ing he vished."

"Vell, he pailed me owit, und I galled on him at his office der same tay. I vound d'at he vas a proker, or bretended do pe, but in reality vas no petter d'an meinselef, except d'at he vas rich und I vas boor. He vas orcanizing, so he dold me, a glub, der object of v'ich, in blain vords, d'ough he didn't shtate it d'at way, vas roppery on a crant scale."

"He vas a lawyer, he salt, und his barnier vas alzo a lawyer, und d'ey hat blendy of monish. D'ey vould furnish der monish und take gare of der poys v'en d'ey got indo drouple, und ve was do do der vork."

"Vell, der glub vas orcanized, und der vork gommenced. Der specialty of der glub vas do be der endling of young Westerners vith vealth to send d'eir monish on do der so-galled prokerage for investment, und either ropping dem on der vay or after d'ey arrifed."

"In the mean time, you jumped your bail, I presume," interrupted the detective.

"For shure."

"And managed to go right along doing business in the same place without fear of arrest?"

"Oh, mein friendt, I vas mate a pig shange in mein looks und shanged mein name."

"I see. Go on."

"Der peesness vent along bretty vell for a v'ile undil ve vound d'at der leater vas geeping all der shwag und ve vas getting nutting, und d'en d'ere vas a glick all 'round. Und d'en der leater galled us dogether und dold us d'at he vas der poss, und d'at if any of us vas not zatsified vith his vay of doing peesness ve could quvit und dake der gousequences. I knew doo vell v'at d'at meant. He hat already forfeited der pail und bait ofer der monish, und I knew d'at der moment I refused his gommands he vould gif' me up do der bolice."

"Had you not the courage to run away and escape his tyranny?"

"Ah, mein friendt, I hat der courage, but not der monish."

"But now you are beyond his power, why do you not expose him?"

"I vould tie fierst!"

"Why?"

"Vor der reason d'at I dold you a v'ile ago, und anudder v'ich I can nefer dell."

"In that case, I do not see that your information is going to be of much value to me."

"I d'ink it vill."

"What I wish to know, above all, is the name of the leader and where he and the rest of the gang may be found."

"Oh, I vill dell you enough for d'at vithout either delling you der leater's name or d'at of der rest of der gang. Der

ledder you haf' vill dell you all you vant do know without gompromising me."

"Very well, go on."

"Vell, vonce der caug vound d'ey vere unter his gondrol like so many slafes, d'ere vas not so much gicking, but d'er' vas zome."

"Were they all in the same predicament as yourself with regard to forfeited bail?"

"Not oxaekly. Some of d'em vare. But d'ey vere all under his gondrol in von vay or anudder."

"Go on."

"It von't be of any use to you for me to dell you of all der ropperries d'at ve haf' gommittid; I vill come do der lasht von—der ropperly of Hargrave. Apout six months aco der poss sendt von of his men do Mexico do look up peesness as he sait. D'is man vas fery glose do der poss himselef, und he allowed him vull shving. Der feller vent owit dere und burchased a saloon und vent indo peesness."

"Bretty soon he mate der acquaintance of Hargrave, un' found owit d'at Hargrave had a lot of monish he vanted do infest. D'is vas our man's came, and he recommended der young man do send his monish do—do—der poss—no, I mean—"

"That will do. You need not try to modify the sentence. I know well enough whom you mean. But never mind that, go on with your story."

The Jew was considerably crestfallen at having exposed so much, and it was evident that he would have given a good deal to have been able to retract what he had said. But it was too late.

At length he evidently made up his mind to equivocate with a view to throwing the detective off the track. He grinned knowingly, and said:

"Oh, ldt vasn't der berson you d'ink. ldt vas another man."

"Very well, Sheeny. I follow you. No explanations are necessary. A wink is as good as a nod, you know. Go on."

"Vell, der young man—Hargrave—send der monish do der proker v'ot I vas speaking apout—not der poss—und der broker sendt it do der safety deposit gompany—"

Thad arose to his feet.

"You need not go any further," he said, sternly. "I know all that, and a good deal more of what you have told me already, except the sending of the agent to New Mexico, and I half suspected that that had been done. So that your revelations so far are worth nothing. You have persistently tried to skim around the real truth from the outset, and when you came near enough to it to enable me to guess the truth, you have equivocated with a view to throwing me off. What do you take me for, fellow? Do you imagine that I started into this business yesterday?"

The Jew did not speak.

In fact, he could not, and sat white and speechless, staring at the detective in awe and terror.

After glowering down at the wretch for some moments, Thad resumed:

"And you expect me to trust you, after all this flimsy twaddle, which you offer as a confession and betrayal of your villainous pals? Do you think I ought to do it?"

Murdoch did not answer at once, but his features gradually relaxed, and it was evident that his old spirit of inimitable impudence was returning, and he was determined to make one more attempt at bravado.

"You vill not trust me?" he whimpered with simulated humility.

"Certainly not!" retorted Thad, savagely. "How can I?"

"You bromised do. Shendlemens shen-gerally geep d'er' vord."

"Not always. It depends upon the circumstances. When the promise is made upon conditions, and those conditions are not fulfilled, the gentleman is not bound to keep his promise. Come, there is one way, at least, in which the truth can be got out of you."

With that the detective snatched up one of his wrists and snapped one end of the handcuffs on it, and then grasped the

other with a view of treating it in a like manner.

Then the Jew's courage failed him, and he began to beg and renew his promises.

"Dond't dake me to brison!" he wailed. "Blease—for Gott's sake, don't dake me to brison, und I vill dell eferyd'ing!"

"No, I can no longer trust you even that far. I have already wasted a good deal of precious time in listening to your idle jargon, and I shall have no more of it."

So saying, he clasped the other handcuff on.

"Now get a move on you, and we shall see what effect a short sojourn in the Hotel de Fallon will have on you."

The Jew continued to whine and implore, but he soon saw that it was all of no avail, and at length relapsed into moody silence.

Thad walked his prisoner to the street, where he called a cab and drove with him to the Criminal Court building in Centre Street, where he procured a warrant for his prisoner, and thence had him transferred to the Tombs prison and locked up.

It was close upon noon when Thad reached home, and he was informed that a man had called several times during the forenoon to see him, and that he had promised to call again.

"What sort of a looking man was he?"

"He looked pretty much like yourself in that make-up," replied the detective's daughter, who had furnished the information, "and I suspect a good deal of his appearance depends upon the same art that yours does, papa."

"I guess I know who the chap is," he said, kissing his daughter. "Well, if he comes again, send him into the studio. I shall be there for some time."

Thad had hardly got settled in his study before there was a knock at the door and the stranger was announced.

As he had anticipated, the caller was none other than Hargrave, although up to the moment his daughter had described him Thad had entertained little hope that the poor fellow was still on earth.

The detective wrung his hand with unusual cordiality, and said:

"You do not know how glad I am to see you, old fellow, for I had about abandoned all hope of ever seeing you alive again."

"You can have no greater pleasure in seeing me than I have in seeing you," responded the Man from Mexico, warmly. "But why did you never expect to see me alive?"

"Before I answer the question sit down and tell me how in the name of wonder you contrived to escape from that blazing hell we were penned in."

"In the same way that you did," rejoined Hargrave, laughing. "By keen running."

"Keen running?"

"Yes. Following your example, I jumped through the flames and legged it for all I was worth."

"But how the deuce did you manage to get out of the shanty without my seeing you? I stood at the front door for several minutes after effecting my escape."

"Ah, but I did not go out that way."

"How did you get out then? I thought that was the only outlet to the place."

"So it is—legitimate outlet. Listen, and I'll tell you all about it."

"Do."

"After jumping through the burning door, as I said, I took to my heels, intending to make a straight cut for the front door, but I had not gone far before I found myself entangled in the heaps of plunder you know there are in the place."

"Yes, I had a siege of it once."

"Well, I turned first in one direction and then in another, and was about making up my mind that I should never find my way out, when I suddenly found myself, before I knew it, jamb up against a wall. This I followed along for some distance, having to heave a bundle of ill-smelling goods out of the way occasionally, and at length came to a window. It was closed with a wooden shutter, and I had no idea how far it was to the

ground, but neither fact stood in my way long.

"My first move was to lift my foot and kick the shutter into smithereens, and my next to leap out of the opening thus made, taking my chances on the probable lighting place. Luckily, the distance to the ground was not very great, and the ground not very hard, so that I was all right so far."

"I then made my way toward the street in a roundabout way, keeping as far away from the shanty as possible. At length I came to the edge of the embankment but there was no stairway, so I was obliged to slide down."

"Again I landed safely, and looked about me. It was already growing light, and pretty soon I noticed a gang of men on the opposite side of the street."

"And if you had looked toward the front of the shanty you would have seen another man standing there," broke in Thad.

"Yourself?"

"Yes."

"Well, my eyes were too busy with the gang to permit me to see anything else. I concealed myself in the shadow of the embankment and watched them for some time. At length a wagon came along and they got in and drove off, but I followed them."

CHAPTER XX.

A REAL CLEW.

Thad's eagerness grew to fever heat when Hargrave mentioned having followed the gang; at the same time he could not restrain a slight touch of envy to think that the man for whom he had allowed the outlaws to escape in order that he might rescue him from possible death should have himself won the honors.

However, the feeling was only transitory, and he quickly banished it as unworthy of him.

"So you followed them, did you?" he said.

"Tell me all about it."

"I will, but you have not told me about how you escaped, what detained you away from home so long, and what became of your prisoner."

"Oh, as to the prisoner, he is safe enough in the Tombs," smiled the detective.

"You don't say! Why, I thought he was going to turn State's evidence and become your ally."

"So did I, but I soon discovered that the fellow was trying to play me for a fool, that his information was nothing that I did not already know, and that he was such an egregious liar that I could believe nothing he said, so I became disgusted and committed him."

"I am a little sorry for that, for I had hoped that the fellow, who is evidently in possession of a great many, if not all of the gang's secrets, would be useful to us."

"I had had the same hope, but after discovering what I have, I am satisfied that he would have done us more injury than good."

"How is that?"

"He would have played the false friend—gathered all the information with regard to our intended movements that he could, and then given them to his pals."

Thad then went on to relate the account of his adventure with the Jew, his going down into the lower cell back of the shanty, and all the details, and concluded with:

"By the way, here is something that will interest you."

So saying, he handed the Man from Mexico the letter he had found under the table in the thieves' den.

Hargrave took the letter, glanced at it hastily, opened his eyes very wide and asked, excitedly:

"Where did you get this?"

"On the floor in the den under the cell where you and I were confined."

"It was in their hands, then?"

"Evidently."

"I wonder how in the name of common sense they could have come into possession of it?"

"I can enlighten you on that part of it."

"Do, for mercy's sake."

"Murdoch, the Jew, stole it of you, while a guest in your room at the St. George Hotel."

Hargrave cast an astonished look at his friend.

"Where did you get that idea?" he questioned.

"I got the information from Murdoch himself."

"He told you that?"

"He certainly did, otherwise I should have known nothing about the affair."

"Well, then, you are warranted in denominating him the greatest liar in creation."

"He did not steal the letter, then?"

"Certainly not."

"How do you know?"

"Because I did not have it in my possession while at the hotel, or since arriving in New York."

"No?"

"No."

"That is strange."

"Nothing strange about it. But let me explain."

"Do, please."

"While I was negotiating with the brokers, Spofford & Gamm, partly by post and partly through the party I told you about, William Ferguson, I received this letter from the firm. As you see, it gives directions about sending the gold, and advises me not to come on until they had succeeded in investing it for me. I did not like that part of it. It looked a trifle suspicious on the face of it, so I took it and showed it to Billy. He read the letter over carefully, and finally said that my suspicions were unfounded, that the firm's advice was for my own good, as they had seen so many young men get into trouble on coming to the city, but promised, in conclusion, to write to the firm for a full explanation of their meaning, and retained the letter."

"He retained the letter, did he?"

"He did."

"And you never saw it afterward?"

"Never, until this minute."

Thad was silent for some time, and then resumed:

"There is but one thing about it, the person to whom you gave that letter—Billy Ferguson, or what not—is a member of the gang (as, indeed, the Jew has already informed me), and has either sent it on to the leader of the gang, or brought it, and is in the city at the present time. In any event, it fixes upon old Spofford as the leader of the gang, and the firm of Spofford & Gamm as the ringleaders in this robbery. We are getting close to the game, my boy."

"I hope so," sighed Hargrave.

"By the way, there is one question I have wanted to ask you for a long time, but have always forgotten it when the opportunity offered. When was the last occasion of your meeting this Billy Ferguson?"

"Let me see," mused the young man. "Come to think of it, it must have been a week previous to my leaving the West."

"What makes you think it was a week?"

Hargrave referred to the date of the letter.

"Yes, that is right," he said. "As you see, this letter is dated July 28. I received it on the 2d of August and took it to Ferguson on the same day. I left on the 8th, and arrived in New York on the 12th, three days before the arrival of the gold and the robbery."

"You did not see him again at any time between that and your departure for the East?"

"I did not."

"How are you sure of this?"

"I am positive, because I called at his saloon twice during the interval to ascertain whether he had received any answer to the letter he had promised to write Spofford & Gamm."

"When did you make your last call?"

"On the 8th, the very day I left."

"And he was not in?"

"No."

"What explanation was given for his absence?"

"They told me on the first occasion that he had gone to Santa Fe, and on the last that he had gone to Denver."

"Ah, and you never ascertained whether either of these stories was correct or not?"

"Certainly not. I had no reason to doubt them."

"No, of course not. But now I presume you are satisfied that he had gone to neither place, but had come to New York instead?"

The young man looked at him in surprise.

"Do you really think so?" he said.

"I am pretty well satisfied of it."

"And that he is one of the gang, eh?"

"Yes. By the way, there would be no trouble about your being able to recognize him, I suppose?"

Hargrave laughed.

"I would know him anywhere," he said.

Thad reflected a moment, and then, looking up suddenly, exclaimed:

"We have wandered away from our original subject. You haven't told me about your following the gang, yet."

"That is true. Well, there is very little to tell, I assure you. When the wagon came along, and I saw them placing a small box of some kind—it was not light enough for me to discern what kind of a box it was—in the wagon, I guessed at once that it was our gang, and that the box was the casket of gold and jewels, and I determined to follow them and see where they went. So I hurried away toward the elevated station, and was soon lucky enough to run across a cab, which I engaged and jumped into."

"By this time the wagon had got started, and they drove so slowly that I might have kept up with them walking."

"You say it was a wagon?" interrupted Thad.

"Yes, an ordinary open wagon, such as are used by farmers."

"And did all the men get in?"

"Yes, eight of them, which made nine with the driver. But when they reached an elevated railway station four of them got out and went up the stairs, to take the train, I presume, and the wagon drove on, and I continued to follow."

"They drove out about a mile further, still following the course of the elevated railroad, and at length the wagon stopped again and the other four men got out, leaving only the driver, the four men ascending the elevated station steps."

"Then which did you follow?" interposed the detective.

"I followed the wagon—very foolishly."

"Why foolishly?"

"The way it turned out."

"How was that?"

"Well, you see, thinking the driver, who, by the way, looked like an old farmer, had my wealth, I determined to follow him, and so I did. He drove on for a short distance and stopped at a small, neat cottage, which seemed to be the home of a market gardener, as there were gardens all about, and the moment the wagon stopped in front of the door, two burly fellows came out and took the casket out of the wagon and carried it into the cottage. Then the man with the wagon drove off."

"Did you follow him any further?"

"Yes, but he only drove back to a stable, a short distance from the fence where you and I were, and turned in."

"Did you make any inquiries at the stable as to who the driver was?"

"Yes, I learned that his name was Donovan, and he is in the employ of the stable."

"Was that all you learned?"

"Yes, I did not like to be too inquisitive, lest I should spoil the business for you. I knew that with the information I have given you you could handle the matter much better than I could."

"Thanks for the compliment. We will go up there at once. Of course you do not know where the other men went?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, you did right in keeping the

treasure in sight, anyway. The men we can look after later. Do you think you would have no trouble in locating the cottage where the casket was left?"

"Not the least. I can go straight to it. I made a point of noting the surroundings so that I would be able to remember how to find the place."

"That is good. You did a good piece of work. You are going ahead of me in this case. But I am sorry I was not with you."

"I wished that a dozen times."

"If I had been, the casket would have never reached the cottage."

"That is what I thought as I rode along. And single handed and unarmed as I was. I thought seriously several times of overtaking the old hayseed and taking the casket away from him. By the way, what do you imagine their motive was in acting the way they did, riding part of the way and then leaving the treasure in the hands of one man?"

"It seems simple enough. In the first place, the place to which they took the casket is probably a respectable neighborhood, and the appearance of a carriage or hack with half a dozen men would have excited curiosity, at least. A common country wagon would not attract attention, especially when occupied by a single, simple countryman for a driver. So, as you say, four of the men got out at the first station to go about their business, as there was no further need for them, and the other four went along as guards as long as it was safe, and then trusted the treasure to the guardianship of the driver, knowing that nobody would suspect him of having that amount of wealth in his possession."

As soon as they had taken lunch, the two men started up-town again.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FRUITLESS SEARCH.

The Man from Mexico did not find it so easy a matter to locate the cottage where he had seen the casket taken as he imagined it would.

In the first place, he had neglected to notice the number of the elevated station nearest it, and consequently did not know where to get off the train.

However, when he had described the locality as minutely as he was able, the detective guessed that it must have been somewhere near 155th Street, and accordingly got off at that station.

But when the young man had got his bearings from here and started in what he supposed to be the direction of the cottage, he turned down-town, and Thad saw that they might just as well have got off at 144th Street.

After wandering about the hills and rocks for a long time and at length coming out into a valley, Hargrave thought he sighted the cottage.

The two men quickened their pace, and were soon at the cottage, and Thad knocked at the door.

As they awaited the response to the summons Thad whispered to his companion:

"We are from Spofford & Gamm's, remember."

"I see," answered Hargrave, "but how about our cowboy make-ups?"

"That is nothing. We're the Western agents for the firm."

"Which will be all right in case these folk know anything about the gang's mode of doing business."

"If they don't, it will not be necessary to explain who we are."

"If the same chaps whom I saw carrying the casket into the house come to the door, it will probably be necessary to give a good long explanation before we succeed in—"

At that moment the door opened.

But neither both nor even one of the burly chaps appeared, but instead a very pretty, modest-looking young lady.

Both men were too much surprised to speak for a second or two, and the young lady came to their assistance by asking:

"What is wanted, gentlemen?"

"Does Mr. Donovan live here?" inquired Thad, as the first thing that came to his mind.

"He does not," was the curt reply.

"Ah, then I have made a mistake. What was that name?" he asked, addressing himself to his companion.

Hargrave was thrown into the greatest state of confusion by this demand, for he was the poorest creature in the world at off-hand invention, and he could think of no name which would be suitable for the occasion.

Meanwhile Thad had been industriously fumbling in his pocket for an imaginary card, and at last appeared to have found what he was looking for, for he took out a card sure enough, and said:

"Ah, yes, here it is. I knew I had it somewhere. Baldwin is the name. Yes, that is it."

Then, looking up at the young lady, who stood holding the door with a frown of impatience, he asked in the most gallant manner:

"Is Mr. Baldwin at home, miss?"

"Not at present," replied the miss, quickly exchanging her frown for a smile of hospitality, "but we expect him any minute now. It is after four, and he is usually home by half-past at the very latest. Won't you step in and wait?"

The detective was about to accept the invitation, when another idea occurred to him, and he said:

"He will probably remain some time when he arrives, will he not?"

"Oh, yes, unless he has some engagement, he usually remains at home all evening."

"Very well. We shall call later."

And he was just turning to go when the young lady asked:

"Who shall I tell papa called?"

"Oh, yes," returned the detective, halting and looking back, "say, if you please, that Mr. Billings, of Mexico, called."

The lady glanced queerly at Hargrave, as much as to ask who he was, but said nothing, and closed the door.

"Now I want you to show me that stable where the wagon came from as quickly as possible," said Thad, as they walked away. "How far is it from here?"

"Oh, it must be a mile or more," replied Hargrave.

"Very well. We'll walk over here and take the elevated down. We must get there and back here as soon as possible."

And they walked on at a race-horse gait for the next five minutes, and arrived at the station.

Not another word had passed between them during the remainder of the walk, and neither spoke until they were seated in the car. Thad had been busy with his own thoughts, and the young man was in too deep a state of perplexity at what he had just seen and heard to permit him to speak.

The detective still remained silent after they were seated in the train, but the young man could not remain so any longer.

After frequent long and wondering stares at the phenomenal being beside him, he finally summoned courage to ask:

"What are we going to do down here, sir?"

Thad started at the sound of Hargrave's voice, like one out of a dream.

"What are we going to do down here?" he repeated. "Why, I purpose finding that driver, Donovan, if possible, and taking him back with us. You may be sure that we found the right house—"

"Oh, I'm quite positive of that," interrupted the other.

"Possibly you are. If you are positive about it, why, then, so am I. But that is not the point. If the driver can also identify the house as the one to which he took the casket, we are pretty sure of being on the right track, not to mention the fact of having a second witness to the circumstance. Catch on?"

"I see."

"We may also be able to pick up another point or two which will be of use to us in our dealings with Mr. Baldwin."

At the mention of the name Hargrave broke out into a hearty laugh.

Thad looked at him in astonishment, and asked:

"What is the matter? Is there anything so humorous about that name?"

"Not about the name itself; but I could not help laughing at the recollection of my own surprise and perplexity when I saw you draw that old business card out of your pocket and instantly give the young lady the name of Baldwin. How in the name of wonder did you discover that Baldwin lived there?"

It was now the detective's turn to laugh.

"One of the tricks of the profession, my boy," he answered.

"So I imagine. But, unless you possess some supernatural power, I'll swear I cannot conceive how you did it."

"I possess no supernatural power," answered Thad, still laughing. "The thing was arrived at in a perfectly natural way, and in one of the simplest ways. So simple, in fact, that I rarely think of employing it any more."

"It is no secret?"

"None whatever."

"Then I should be pleased to hear what it is."

"Very well, you shall be gratified. You may not have noticed the fact, but the young lady wore a small brooch at her throat which formed the letter 'B.'"

"Yes, I noticed that. But how did you come to infer that it stood for Baldwin? Why not Burns, or Butler, or Barnes, or—"

"Listen. I am not in the habit of jumping at conclusions. Before I put forth a theory I am pretty well satisfied as to its tenability, I am tolerably sure of my grounds."

"I'd swear to that."

"When I asked you for the name it was only for the purpose of gaining time. My fumbling for the card was done for the same purpose. I hoped by this means to wear the girl's patience so that she would come to my relief by pronouncing the name. But she was stubborn. She was determined that I should recall the name before she would vouchsafe the show of hospitality she afterward extended. Meanwhile, as you may suppose, my thoughts were busy. So were my eyes and ears. In the fraction of a minute I had taken in everything about the place. At length my eyes fell upon the ground, and began to search for bits of paper, envelopes—anything that might have a name written on it. Hundreds of clues are found in this way. On this occasion I was luckier than usual. Right under the edge of the step, where it had been rained on and half beaten into the earth, was a yellow envelope. On it was written in a bold hand 'Baldwin.' The rest of the name was concealed by the step, but that, taken in connection with the 'B' on the young lady's pin, was enough. It was an hypothesis that would not miss one time in a thousand, and yet, as I say, so simple a one that I rarely think of resorting to it except in extreme cases, like this one."

"Well, by Jove!" ejaculated the Man from Mexico, with a deep sigh. "You simply beat anything I ever encountered! This is wonderful!"

Thad laughed heartily at his friend's simplicity.

"You remember I told you, on our first meeting," pursued Hargrave, "that you did not fill my ideal of a detective?"

"I believe you said something of the kind."

"I take it all back. You beat anything I ever heard of."

"Hullo, this is our station!" cried Thad, jumping up and running toward the door.

Hargrave followed, and they were none too early, for the gates were just closing.

It was but a few steps from the station to the stable, and our friends were soon there.

Thad made inquiry with regard to Donovan, and luckily the driver was in at that time.

When the man was called the detective began by asking:

"Did you carry a box—a small iron box—this morning, from 115th Street to a cottage in the neighborhood of 147th Street?"

"I did, sir," answered the man, bluntly.

"Where did you get the box?"

"Faix, sor, divil a wance did Oi lay the finger av me an the box. A gintlemin kim' here an' axed for a wagon for to haul a box, an' the boss tould me to hitch up old

Baldy an' the sorril mare an' take the blue-bodied wagon an' go do the job, an' Oi wint. Oi expected to find a box the big-ness av a strate-car, but, bedad, whin Oi got there Oi found a wee little moight, the solze av a dinner-pail."

"But where did you get it?" demanded Thad, impatiently.

"In Wan Hundred an' Fifteent' Strate, sor."

"In a house?"

"No, sor. A pairty of min was sthandin' be the roadside, an' whin Oi druv' up two av thim h'isted the wee little box int' the wagon, an' thim eight av thim clin' in an' wint pairt o' the way wi'd me. An' thim wan av thim guv' me the d'reeshuns as to phere to drolve, an' thim the lot o' thim got out, an' Oi druv an to the place Oi was tould."

"Whom did you meet at the cottage?"

"Faix, Oi didn't mate any wan. A pair av moogs kim' out an' lifted the box out av the wagon an' lugged it int' the shanty, an' that's all Oi know."

"Do you think you could identify the cottage again?"

"Oi could."

"Well, if I obtain permission of the boss, will you go with us and point out the cottage?"

"Oi will."

Thad explained the case to the proprietor and obtained permission for the driver to accompany him, and, for the purpose of expedition, had him hitch up a rig and drive them over.

"Could you identify any of the men, do you think?" asked the detective, as they drove along.

"Wan or two, Oi think, sor."

"What was the man who gave you the instructions where to drive like?"

"He was a big, sthout fella, w'd a v'ice an him like a sthage-actor."

"Did you take any notice of the box?"

"Yis, sor, Oi noticed that it was ayther oiron or bound wi'd oiron, an' the min hefted it as though it moight contain gold."

"Which it did, Donovan," laughed the detective.

"Howly saints! Wouldn't Oi loike—but here's our place, sor," he broke off abruptly. "That's it over there."

CHAPTER XXII.

A GLIMPSE OF THE GAME.

The Irishman having pointed out the same cottage that Hargrave had indicated, the detective was satisfied. So, slipping a generous tip into his hand, Thad said:

"We won't trouble you any longer, Donovan. We'll leave you here. But if it should be necessary to subpoena you as a witness at any time, I suppose you could go on the stand and swear to the facts with regard to this affair?"

"Shure, an' Oi could, sir," rejoined the driver, unctuously. "But, would yez moind tellin' me, sor, was this box stole?"

"So it was, Donovan. But, drive back now, and don't ask any more questions."

Thad and his companion had alighted from the wagon.

"Oi will thot," assented the Celt, "but would yez moind me tellin' yez thot Oi thought there was something qua'r-loike about thim fella's?"

"I've no doubt, Donovan," laughed the detective, "now that you have discovered what they were."

The two men had alighted a hundred yards or so from the cottage, not to attract the attention of either the inmates or their neighbors; so they made the rest of the way on foot.

Reaching the cottage, Thad knocked at the door, and the same young lady appeared.

She smiled when she saw who was her caller.

"I'm very sorry, but papa has been here and gone again. He had a very pressing engagement," she explained at once. "He has gone to a meeting of some kind, and I know he never gets back from such places till very late."

Disappointed, not to say disgusted, Thad had to appear complacent, so answered quietly:

"Very well; I shall probably call again. Good-evening."

"Good-evening, sir."

Both men turned abruptly away.

Neither of the men looked back after leaving the door, but each instinctively knew that the girl continued to hold the door open, watching them until they were out of sight of the house.

Then Thad paused in his walk.

"That girl has been watching us, do you know it?" he said.

"Yes, so I discovered," was the rejoinder.

"Well, we must counter on her. I want you to go back."

The young man looked at him with surprise.

"In my opinion," Thad explained, "the girl has not told the truth. I suspect her father is in the house at this very moment. If he belongs to this gang of thieves, as we do not doubt he does, he suspected our true character and mission, and gave the young woman instructions to say that he was out."

"That seems quite reasonable," admitted Hargrave.

"Now what I want you to do is to go back—not too near the house; then to secrete yourself, if possible, in a position where you can have a good view of the front of the cottage and watch. In the mean time, I shall take the first downtown train on the elevated, go to a justice and procure a search warrant, get the assistance of a small squad of police, and return. Do you think you can do your part of it?"

"If that is all, certainly."

"Do not quit your post unless you see a man or a party of men emerge from the cottage; in that case follow and see where they go, and when you have satisfied yourself on this point, hasten back, for I shall remain here if you are absent. Do not let them give you the slip, especially if they happen to be carrying a certain box."

"I shall do as you say, sir."

The detective hurried away.

It was in the neighborhood of seven o'clock when he took the train, and the courts then being closed, he made his way to the residence of a police judge with whom he was well acquainted, and there procured the search warrant.

That procured, he proceeded to the nearest police station to procure the needed men, and with his squad, took the train for up-town.

In less than two hours from the time of his departure he was back to the rendezvous, and as he approached, the Man from Mexico emerged from a clump of shrubbery and hurried toward him.

Hargrave was greatly excited.

"I've made a muck of it," he began. "I've neglected the very thing you charged me with. But it was not my fault."

"Explain," said Thad.

"Well, sir, you hadn't been gone ten minutes before a buggy drove up to the house containing a single man. The man alighted and ran in, and, five minutes later, he emerged again, and another man was with him. The second man had a coat over his arm and was evidently prepared for traveling, and he got into the buggy with the first man, and they drove away together."

"And you did not follow?"

"How could I follow? I had no vehicle, while they were seated in a buggy with a fleet horse."

Thad drew a deep sigh.

"Oh, well," he said, "as you remarked, it was no fault of yours. But did you notice anything that resembled our box in their possession?"

"No. They brought nothing out of the house."

"That is good, at all events. Had you any chance to see what sort of a man in appearance was the one who came out of the house?"

"Yes. I had a good view, by moonlight, of his face and figure."

"What was he like?"

"Tall, rather portly, good-looking, and about forty-five or fifty, I should say."

"Let me see. Have you ever met your broker, Colonel Brunswick Spofford?"

"No; strange to say, although I was doing business with them and was in town three days before the robbery took place,

I have never met either one of the firm. I called at their office frequently, but both happened to be always out."

Thad nodded and smiled.

"Clever crooks, the pair of them," Thad commented. "But, this is not getting in our work. Come, men," he went on, turning to the policemen, "we will march over to your cottage!"

Thad soon knocked once more at the door.

This time it was opened by a rather tough-looking man, one of those whom Hargrave had seen carrying the casket into the house.

"Wot's wantin'?" demanded the fellow, sullenly.

"Is Mr. Baldwin in?" questioned Thad.

"No, he ain't!" muttered the man.

"I'm sorry. How soon will he be back?"

"He won't be back ter-night, an' yer can't see him."

As the detective had talked he had edged himself closer to the door.

This the ruffian noticed, and then, for the first time, poked his head out a little further. Espying the squad of police, he made a hasty and vigorous attempt to close the door in Thad's face, but was foiled in that, for the detective had thrust his foot within the door in time to catch it.

"Not quite so fast, my fine fellow!" he warned. "Come, men!"

In an instant the six policemen were at his back.

Throwing their combined weight against the door, it flew open in a hurry, and away darted the ruffian on guard.

Thad and his escort, including Hargrave, marched into the hall, and hearing an uproar in the back room, guessed that the fellow had notified the family of what was in the wind.

At once Thad marched his men to the rear, and before any one could prevent, the whole squad filed into the back parlor, from whence the uproar had emanated.

To the detective's surprise, no women were there, but, in their stead, four men.

Two of these were the hard characters Hargrave had seen carrying the casket, one of whom had opened the door; the third was one whom neither the detective nor Hargrave had ever seen before, and the fourth, the wily Sylvester Madden!

This bevy of rogues was so panic-stricken that they stood staring in stupid amazement at the new-comers.

Immediately Thad stepped up to Madden, put out his hand, and said:

"You don't seem to recognize an old friend, Madden," and even as he spoke he had snatched the man's wrists, one after the other, and deftly slipped the handcuffs on them.

"Now, you fellows," he called out, addressing the other three, "I have no warrant for any one's arrest except this man, Madden, but I shall exercise my authority as an officer to the extent of placing you under arrest on suspicion of complicity in this man's crimes, pending a search we are going to make of the house."

"On what charge are you arresting me?" demanded Madden.

"Unnecessary to explain, Mr. Madden," was answered, "but I will accommodate you by reading the warrant."

Whereupon he drew forth the warrant, procured some days before for Madden's arrest.

The latter appeared satisfied, and relapsed into sullen silence.

"Men, two of you keep an eye upon this fellow," ordered Thad, pointing to the prisoner, "and the others take charge of these three. 'Unless,' he broke off, turning to Madden, "unless you want to accompany us on our search of the house and lend the knowledge you undoubtedly possess with regard to the whereabouts of a certain article we are in quest of."

The fellow made no response, not even lifting his eyes from the floor.

"It might be of advantage to you," pursued the detective persuasively, "to go with us and show us where to find the article."

"I do not know what article you refer to," declared Madden, doggedly.

"In that case I will enlighten you. It is

the casket containing the gold bullion, coin and jewels which was, until last night, stored in the fence of our mutual friend, Uncle Isaac. Do you recall it now?"

"I know what you allude to, but I know no more about it than you do."

"Perhaps one of you men could enlighten me, then?" pursued the detective, addressing the ruffians. "I happen to know that you two men carried the article in question from a wagon into the house somewhere about half-past five o'clock this morning."

The men shook their heads, but made no reply.

"Will you assist me, and thereby save yourselves the mortification of being locked up, or will you choose the latter alternative?"

Still no response.

"Very well," said Thad, turning away. "Men, look after the prisoners, as I have instructed you, and I and my young friend here will attend to the searching. Come, Manton, my boy!" and the search began.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RAFFLED TO THE END.

Needless to detail that quest. Every room in the house was ransacked and scrutinized—even to the little box of a cellar beneath the kitchen, but not a trace of the missing casket was found, greatly to the chagrin and disappointment of Thad, and particularly so to the Man from Mexico, to whom that casket meant so much.

Convinced, at last, that the box was not in the house, or, if so, was secreted beyond discovery, the two returned to the room where the prisoners still remained in charge of the watchful officers.

Entering the sitting-room again, the chagrined detective's eyes fell upon the repugnant features of the villain Madden, and he was somewhat consoled by the thought that he had him safe, at all events. The raid on the cottage had at least brought one triumph.

"Now," said Thad, addressing the policemen, "we shall leave here, taking this man along with us," indicating Madden, "but the other three we can, for the present, let go. We'll know them hereafter, if they are wanted."

Thad took special charge of Madden, and that unworthy marched sullenly along without a word, until they were seated in the car. He remained silent for some time after the train was under way, but at length raised his eyes furtively to his captor's face, and asked in a low voice:

"Got anybody else?"

"Only Murdoch," indifferently.

Madden sneered.

"Oh, that pup!" he growled, and, lifting his heavy brows, he glanced about the car, as if in fear that, even in his present situation, the omnipresent eye of the terrible boss might be upon him; then, turning to the detective again, he queried:

"It's all up with me now, I suppose?"

"I guess you are in for it."

"And no way out of it?"

"I'm afraid not."

Madden was silent for some moments, and then spoke further:

"Didn't Sheeny weaken any when you took him?"

"Somewhat, but not as much as I would have supposed."

"Didn't offer to split?"

"No."

"That's funny."

"He agreed to make a confession," observed Thad, after a pause, "after a good deal of persuasion, and did actually pretend to do so, but before he was half through I discovered that his so-called confession was such a mixture of truth and falsehood that I became disgusted and refused to hear any more of it."

Madden laughed.

"Sheeny to the letter," he smiled. "The dog couldn't tell the truth, even if it were to his best interest. But, that was not all the trouble. His greatest repugnance, I think you found, was in disclosing the name of the leader of the gang."

"Yes, that was his sticking point."

"I knew it. He is a contemptible coward, and has a profound dread of the boss. I confess to a good deal of dread of him

myself, but nothing compared to that of Murdoch. His was simply abjectness itself."

"What is there about this boss? Is he such a bloodthirsty wretch as all that?"

"No, I do not know that he ever killed a man in his life. I do not even believe he could be induced to kill any one; but there is something in his presence, his smiling, benign presence, that causes every one to quail and tremble at his approach, or at the sound of his voice. I do not understand it. I only know that, although I never met any other human being of whom I was in the least afraid, that man can make me get down upon my knees to him!"

"He must be a wonderful man—a wonderful leader of men."

"His like never existed since the days of Mokanna, the Veiled Prophet."

"Does this influence exert itself when you are away from him?"

"To some extent, but nothing as it does when you are in his presence. In fact, it has a different effect upon different people."

"With yourself, for instance?"

"With me, while I experience no real fear of him when out of his sight, I still retain a certain dread, such as I cannot describe."

"Perhaps it is the knowledge of his power, of the existence of the gang over which he wields dominion, who, you fear, may be lurking somewhere about ready to rush upon you the instant you divulge a word of the society's secrets?"

"I do not think that it is. It seems, after being in his presence a while, and then get away, that the atmosphere, the whole universe are permeated with his presence or influence."

"And yet I presume there is not much affection for him?"

"On the contrary, there never existed a man who had so few friends as he. As for myself, I hate and loathe him with the uttermost strength of my being."

"You would not hesitate very much, then, in your present situation, to at least disclose his name?"

Madden turned pale at the very idea.

For a long time he remained silent, apparently undergoing a terrible struggle with his emotions.

At length he controlled his feelings in a measure, and replied in a comparatively calm voice:

"No, I would rather not disclose his name."

"But it may result in a good deal of good to you," insinuated the detective. "It may result in—"

"In my release," interrupted Madden. "I know it. And I also know that my treachery would result in his confinement, so that he could do me no injury, and yet, with all these facts before me, I could not make up my mind to divulge his name."

"Oh, well, that is of little moment anyway, as I already know who he is. But you will at least tell me this much: Does he reside at the cottage we have just left?"

"No."

"You are sure of this?"

Madden hesitated, and then answered:

"I do not ask you to believe anything I tell you, sir. I have neither expressed my intention of making a confession, nor am I, under any manner of promises of reward or threats, to be induced or coerced into making a confession. If I am to go to prison or swing, so be it! My life is a blank—has been a failure, anyway, and it matters very little to me what becomes of me, but nobody shall ever say that I was a traitor."

This seemed to put a quietus to Thad's cherished hope, that of winning a confession out of the fellow, and he fell into a thoughtful silence, which lasted several minutes.

He could but be impressed with one discovery—that Madden evidently was an educated man, and had undoubtedly been brought up amidst the greatest refinement.

He was somewhat eager, therefore, to know something of the fellow's past life, and to ascertain how it was he had fallen into such depths of depravity.

At length he resumed:

"You impress me, Madden, as a man who has seen better and happier days. Your own admissions evidence that. That you are a man of education and reading your language testified. I should be pleased to hear something of your past life, if you do not mind telling it."

The prisoner looked up with a start as if he had been pricked with a sharp instrument.

His black, malevolent eyes were fixed upon the detective like those of a serpent, his heavy brows were contracted and his thin, passionless lips quivered slightly.

"My past life?" he muttered at last.

Then he broke forth into a hard, feelingless laugh.

"My past life," he repeated, "is a blank; I told you that a while ago."

"But there may have been times to which you can look back with a glow of satisfaction or happiness, glad childhood days. I know you had a home once, a loving mother, perhaps; sweet, tender sisters. Possibly some one—"

"Bosh!" he interrupted in a disgusted tone. "I tell you, once for all, that I have no past. My life from this day backward is a total blank. There you are. You are something of a student of human nature, I perceive; a seeker after and appreciator of curios; there you have it. A greater phenomenon than is to be found in the British Museum or the Vatican is a man without a past, and you have discovered him!"

Thad was perplexed, and had concluded to discuss the matter no farther with the prisoner, when the latter suddenly broke in again.

"I can readily understand that you should imagine from my conversation that I was once a shining light in society, a paragon of virtue, and all that sort of thing, but you are wrong, totally wrong. I was always just as bad, as heartless and as vulgar as you see me now, and it is my veriest wish to always remain so. I was born a thief and a liar, and it has been my life-long ambition to excel in those accomplishments. You possibly imagined that I had gathered my knowledge under the classic dome of some university. It is not so. And, although I do not mind telling you that I am a thorough master of nine different languages, it will surprise you, no doubt, to be told that I learned to read while sitting on a prison bed."

Thad was more puzzled than ever, but after a little thought he arrived at the conclusion that the fellow was neither demented nor attempting to evade confession; he was simply a constitutional liar.

"Yes," he said, after a little more reflection, "there is no discount on you as a curio; but not in the sense of being a man without a past. Your own few vague hints prove that you had a past. But, as a clear-cut, monumental liar you are entitled to the palm. Come, here is where we get off!"

Taking his prisoner by the arm, the two passed out of the train and down the stairs, mutely followed by Hargrave.

Here a conveyance being secured, the prisoner was driven to the Tombs prison, where he was locked up.

As the officer and Hargrave walked away, the latter said:

"I was intensely interested in that conversation with Madden on the train. But there is one point in which you wrong the fellow."

"What is that?"

"With regard to his past life."

"Do you believe that story of his?" demanded Thad.

"I do. In short, I have evidence that the fellow was, as he has said, born a thief—born in a prison cell, in fact. His mother was a galley slave and his father a notorious burglar."

"But his education, his evident refinement—"

"Self-acquired, and for no other motive than the more successfully to carry on his nefarious trade."

"Then I have wasted a good deal of sentiment on a very unworthy subject," assumed Thad. "But it is the first time I was ever deceived."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STRANGE STORY.

The sun was just edging over the house-tops and the street was beginning to awaken to the activity of day as they entered the door of the detective's home. Both were too much fatigued even for conversation, and as soon as they had partaken of a cup of coffee they retired to their couches.

As they separated, Hargrave handed Thad a little book, with the words:

"Some time at your leisure, glance through that; you will find it interesting."

Thad took the book, which was a thin affair, and did not appear to contain more than twenty pages, and went to his room without so much as opening it.

Norwithstanding his extreme fatigue, he was awake by noon, and feeling thoroughly refreshed, sprang out of bed and took a bath.

The Man from Mexico was still sleeping soundly, so Thad took his breakfast without disturbing his ally, and returned to his studio, deciding to take things easy for a few hours during the afternoon, and be fresh for operations again at night.

But he soon found himself ill at ease; in vain he tried to interest himself in some book; the scenes through which he had passed in the last few days would thrust themselves forward and claim precedence of everything else.

And above all, the interview with Madden, the strange story he had told, and the later corroboration of it by Hargrave, all filled his mind with a sort of hazy mystery and sense of eagerness that he had never experienced before.

Then he asked himself how the Man from Mexico came in possession of the information touching Madden's past life which he had volunteered, and instantly he remembered the little book, and somehow there appeared to be some sort of inexplicable association between it and Madden's queer story.

Thad had left the book in his bedroom, so he arose at once and went for it.

When he reached the room he found his daughter, Hortense, sitting in an indolent position on a sofa, perusing the very book he had come in quest of, and appeared to be deeply absorbed in it.

As soon as her father entered the girl looked up and greeted him with a cheery good-morning (it was the first time they had met that morning), and then asked:

"Papa, where did you get this book? It is the queerest thing I ever ran across. It is all about a man without a past. That's funny, ain't it?" she laughed. "The history of a man without a history."

"Oh, you've got my book, have you, missy?" rejoined her father, administering a playful tap on his daughter's cheek. "I have just come in to get it."

"I saw it here on the stand and picked it up carelessly, and when I opened it I was surprised to see that it was written."

"Written?"

"Yes, every word of it is in writing, not printed."

"That is strange. What is it about?"

"Haven't you read it, papa?"

"Haven't even opened it."

"Where did you get it?"

"Mr. Hargrave handed it to me this morning and told me to read it at my leisure, and I did not even open it at the time. What is it about, anyway?"

"Why, it says 'The History of a Man Without a Past.'"

"Any name signed to it as the author?"

"There is the name 'Gerald Baldwin' here at the bottom of the title page."

"Baldwin!" and the detective snatched the book from the girl, excitedly.

"Why, what is there about that name, papa?" asked the girl, curiously.

"Oh, nothing, only—"

He was too deeply absorbed in the volume by this time to think of anything else.

He had commenced with the first lines and was reading on and on, oblivious to the presence of his daughter, who sat,

meanwhile, watching his face and wondering how soon he would return the book.

Then suddenly recollecting himself, he arose, with the intention of returning to his study, when Hortense, whom he had forgotten, spoke:

"Papa, you aren't going to take the book away, are you?"

He glanced down at his daughter, and appeared to be surprised at seeing her there.

"Certainly not," he replied. "That is—say, come along into the study, Sis, and we'll read it together—that is, if—"

"Oh, there's nothing there that I shouldn't read," she interrupted, guessing at what he was about to say.

"Very well; come along!"

And they tripped away to the study, arm in arm.

The book had been an ordinary cheap account book; the paper had grown yellow with age and the ink was faded. The writing was a small, neat hand, resembling that of a woman.

Thad saw that there was very little of it, there being only a dozen pages devoted to the biography, and the rest of the volume taken up with memoranda, accounts and the like.

What he read was as follows:

"The History of a Man Without a Past. This may seem queer to you, reader, but, as a matter of fact, I was never born. You don't believe it? It is true, nevertheless.

"My first recollection of anything is of looking out of a grated door at some ugly men in uniform. I was just as tall as their knees, and I hated them because I was not as tall as their heads.

"There was an ugly woman in the cell (for know that it was a prison cell), and she told me these men were guards, men who hunted and imprisoned thieves, and that for that reason I must hate them, for I was a thief and she was a thief. But it was not necessary for her to tell me to hate the men, for I did that already.

"The woman also told me that my father was a thief—the cleverest one in England, and that he had killed several men, including bobbies. She explained that the men outside of the grated door were bobbies.

"You think this woman was my mother? You are mistaken. She was not. I never had a mother. Once I asked her, when I was older—ten, I think—I had been sentenced twice for pocket-picking. I recollect—if she was not my mother. She glared at me and answered 'No.' Then I asked her why she always kept me with her—when we both happened to be out of prison. She replied, 'Because I have no dog. I would prefer a dog, but as I have no dog, I have you.' So I knew from that she was not my mother, and that I was not as good as a dog.

"I continued to grow, and pretty soon I was as tall as the woman. She had grown still uglier by this time. Not only because she had got some gray hairs and many wrinkles, but she had had many fights, and her face had become so much scarred that it was impossible to add another scar without making it on top of an old one. She had also lost most of her teeth and one eye. Oh, she was awfully ugly. That, I think, was the principal reason for my knocking her downstairs with a chair when I was in my cups. I never saw her after that, for she went to the hospital, where she remained so long that I had time to serve out my time for striking her and get another sentence for highway robbery before she got out. And then by the time I breathed the air of liberty again, she had got a life sentence in the galleys. Poor woman! She would have made a capital prig, only she was indiscreet. She would pick a gentleman's pocket, spend the money for gin, and when she was giggly go on the street, and if she ran across him again, offer him his empty purse.

"The gentlemen would generally laugh at this, supposing she had found the purse where it had been thrown away by some prig; but sometimes they would be

angry and curse or even cane her; and occasionally one would have her arrested.

"And then she was careless and slovenly about her work. If I recollect aright, her last term was for slitting the wizen of a lady whom she had gone to nurse, and then thoughtlessly dropped the knife into her pocket, where it was found by the police, all bloody. This is criminal carelessness, besides being inartistic in the extreme. Knowing the woman as I did, I can hardly credit the story. She was slovenly, but not a fool. Nobody but a fool would do such a thing. But if she did do it, she deserved what she got.

"She was not my mother. I am sure of it. I never had a mother. Ergo, I never was born. My theory is that I was evolved from the accumulation of vice which had been left in the prison pen by the criminals who had inhabited it for so many years. You do not believe this? Then you need not. You have never spent your youth in a prison pen and amused yourself by peeping through a grated door at large-legged bobbies in uniform. It always seemed to me—looking at them through this grated door—that it must have been the effort of their lives to carry those legs, they were so inordinately corpulent. But I found in after years that they could carry them with uncommon alacrity and could run like fiends when in chase of a thief.

"The man who the woman said was my father, I never saw. I have heard that he was a prime crack, and had the honor of being the first man who ever succeeded in entering the Bank of England under the new regime. I think I might have been proud of him, though I should not have loved him. I never loved anybody.

"At the age of fifteen I had become an expert crack, but I could not read. I found this a great disadvantage. It is difficult to do business among gentlemen without being able to read. But what could I do? I could not enter a school at that age. Finally fortune favored me.

"I received a sentence of ten years for burglary, and on account of my youth was given unusual liberties. My cell-mate was an ex-Catholic priest. He was a very learned man, but a very bad one. He delighted in recounting the crimes he had committed while still wearing the holy robes. My God! if I had been a man of any feeling, of what you call heart, I should have shuddered at that man's stories of his crimes, and hated him. But instead, I admired and venerated him. This shows you that I am not human—I was not born. For had I been born, I should have inherited some of the feeling and sympathy of a woman. I possess none. Ergo, again, I was never born.

"But of this priest, Father Dugro was his name. He was a Frenchman. I never liked the French, because they strangle their victims. But I admired Father Dugro. He taught me to read. He taught me not only to read French and English, but Latin, Greek and Sanscrit. The rest of the modern languages I taught myself afterward. But in all our readings he taught me to revere only the bad. The good, he would instruct me, was puerile—hypocrisy. He was a wonderful man, though, and I was very lonesome, more so than I have ever been for any other being, when my term expired and I was obliged to leave him. I think I shed tears. It was the first and last I ever shed, except with vexation when the big-legged bobbies would tease me. But I believe I had something akin to pity for him. He was a lifer. And I could not but think of the excitement and pleasure of liberation, re-arrest and liberation again he would miss.

"At length, after traveling over the whole of Europe, I grew tired of that country, and came to America—"

"Papa," interrupted Hortense, "I don't believe I want to hear any more of that. It is too awful. I do not see how it is possible for any person to be as bad as that man makes himself out to be. Do you?"

"It is hard to tell, dear," answered her father, closing the book. "It is hard to believe and horrible to realize if made to believe it. But we will read no more of it. You may go, dear, and if Mr. Hargrave has finished his breakfast, you might send him here."

Nevertheless, Thad did read more—all, every word, of the book, and from its pages gathered more proof in the matter he was engaged in than he could have gained in the ordinary way in weeks of labor.

He had just finished the last sentence when Hargrave opened the door and walked in.

CHAPTER XXV.

MAKING A NEW START.

The moment Hargrave entered the room his eyes fell upon the book which Thad had tossed upon the table and he laughed.

"Been perusing the history?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Thad, "and a strange history it is."

"What do you think of it?"

"It is indescribable and unrefusable. It is evidently the work of the most depraved man who ever lived, or else of a most ingenious one."

"Do you believe the story?"

"I hardly know what to think of that."

"It is the life of our friend Madden, you know."

"Yes, I should have known that from the style of composition, after the conversation I had with him. By the way, how did you get hold of it?"

"He gave it to me and asked me to read it."

"When?"

"While we were rooming together."

"You don't tell me!" exclaimed Thad, with a horrified expression.

Hargrave guessed at the detective's misapprehension, laughed, and hastened to explain.

"Oh, you needn't imagine that he told me it was his," he said. "We got to talking about strange characters, criminals and the like, and at length he said: 'I have something here in that line that will astonish you,' and brought out this book. After reading a portion of it, I looked up and found him laughing. 'What do you think of it?' he asked. 'It is the most abominable thing I ever ran across,' I answered, at which he laughed again, and then said: 'It is a strange work, and yet do you know that every word of it is true?' I expressed my doubts that any man was quite as depraved as that there portrayed, to which he answered that he knew it to be true. And then I asked him where he had obtained it, and he answered that a life prisoner at Portland had given it to him."

"You never suspected that it concerned himself?"

"Never dreamed of it until I heard the conversation between you and him last night. Then I knew that it was his own life."

"Nevertheless, it may still be the reminiscences of some other criminal. He is a braggart by nature, and just such a man as would be likely to take upon himself the 'honors' of others."

"There may be something in that. But it seems strange that a man in his position should wish to make out his case worse than it really is."

"Morbid ambition for notoriety. There are plenty of such cases. By the way, the work—the last part of it, at least—possesses some value by furnishing evidence against him and the rest of the gang in the present case."

"You think that latter part refers to this case, do you?"

"Undoubtedly."

"We may be able to make something out of it, then."

"There is another clew which it seems to open up."

"What is that?"

"Did you not notice the name of Baldwin on the title page?"

"Yes."

"I believe that that is his real name."

"Ah!" ejaculated the young man. "Then you think that there is some connection between him and the dwellers in the cottage?"

"I do."

"It might be coincidence," mused the young man.

"Did he ever say anything about the name?"

"Yes; he explained that it was the name of the writer—that is, the Portland lifer."

"If there is anything in this theory about his real name being Baldwin, it will upset the other one, that the cottage was occupied by Spofford, the broker."

"I would rather think the place was occupied by this fellow than by the broker. The lack of luxury about the whole place would indicate that it belonged to a man of moderate means and simple habits, rather than a rich man, as I should judge Spofford to be."

"Yes, and yet that goes for nothing in the long run. For the sake of carrying out his ends, it would not be out of the way for so wily a rascal as Spofford to maintain an establishment of the kind to which he could retire now and then when he was too hotly pressed to remain in his more luxurious home. That reminds me that I have never run upon a clew or a hint of a clew that led me to believe he had another, or rather any home."

"Spofford?"

"Yes."

"I guess in the matter of that he is about as discreet as you thought Mad-den."

"It seems so. And he is not only discreet, but from what I have been able to glean from the two men we have taken, he must be a man of most extraordinary magnetic or hypnotic powers."

"So it would seem."

"If what they say is true, he rules these poor wretches like so many slaves, and they are afraid to say their souls are their own, even when away from him."

Thad dropped his head in his hands, as was his wont when in deep meditation, and thus remained for some time.

Meanwhile, the Man from Mexico had seated himself and was perusing the remarkable book.

Suddenly Thad jumped to his feet and exclaimed:

"Come! This will never do! We must get to work. There is no time for idleness."

"What is the first move?"

The detective consulted his watch.

"It is now half-past two. They close at three. By the liveliest hustling we may be able to reach there before they close. Come on. We won't wait to make up."

And he gathered his hat and made for the door.

Hargrave snatched up his hat and followed, but with a dazed, uncertain look.

They were on the down-town platform of the elevated railway before Hargrave could catch enough breath to ask:

"Where are you going?"

"Didn't I tell you?" snapped Thad, awakening from his reverie.

"You did not. You spoke of being in time to catch somebody before they closed—"

"Sure enough. I didn't tell you. Pardon me. But here is our train."

When they were seated in the car, Thad said, in a calmer voice:

"It just occurred to me to make another call upon Spofford & Gamm at their office. An interview now, with the evidence in my possession will, I think, result in something different from the previous one I had with the firm."

"If you can secure an interview," improvised the other, doubtfully.

"Yes, that will be the difficulty. After the close chase we have given them, it is doubtful if either of them can be caught in."

"Besides, the clerks will probably know you and give them timely warning."

"I do not anticipate that they will

recognize me in my natural appearance. I have never been in the office without disguise, so that undisguised, I am disguised the most, to parody the old proverb about beauty."

The remainder of the journey was made for the most part in silence, and the two men arrived at the office door at exactly five minutes to three o'clock.

"Just on the tap," said Thad, with a smile, and opened the door.

To all appearance everything was running along in the brokerage establishment of Spofford & Gamm as smoothly as though nothing had ever happened to ruffle the even tenor. The clerks were busy behind the brass grating, closing up the last item of business of the day, and did not so much as look up when Thad approached the pigeon-hole.

"Is either Mr. Spofford or Mr. Gamm in?" he asked of the busy clerk.

"Neither," was the curt reply; "both gone for the day, but will be here tomorrow, I presume."

The clerk had never raised his eyes during this colloquy.

Thad reflected, and then resumed:

"My business is urgent. Can neither of the gentlemen be seen to-night?"

For the first time the clerk raised his eyes to the detective's face.

He eyed Thad curiously for a moment, and then answered:

"No."

And then dropped his eyes to the book again.

"This is annoying," muttered Thad. "Here I have just arrived from the West with a large amount of gold, which was to have been placed with the firm, and the banks are all closed. What am I to do?"

Again the clerk lifted his eyes languidly:

"What is the name, please?" he questioned, in a lazy drawl.

Thad thought rapidly.

Would it do to give the same name that he had given before? It was hazardous, but if he gave another there would be no evidence that he had had any dealings with the firm, so he decided to venture it.

"Billings," he answered.

The name was no more than out of his mouth when he saw that he had made a mistake.

"Ah, yes," said the clerk, with a sarcastic smile. "From Mexico, I believe. Well, the firm has decided not to handle your money, Mr. Billings. Bradstreet does not rate you to our liking, and we do not care to transact any business with you."

The fellow dropped his eyes to his work again, and Thad turned from the window.

If the alleged transaction had been bona fide and they had snubbed him in this manner he could not have been more crestfallen.

Rejoining his companion, he said:

"The mistake of my life. That old sharper spotted me that day I was in here, and now the fat is in the fire. But I have another resource."

"What now?"

"Come on. The directory. I never like to profane the sanctity of a man's home—even a thief—except as a last resort, but now that has come."

The two men hurried out of the office, and Thad made his way with all haste to the nearest drug store to consult a directory.

"Gamm" coming first in the directory, he turned to the "G's" and ran his finger down column after column, but, although there were any number of Gamm's, there was no Solomon Gamm, and no Gamm of the firm of Spofford & Gamm.

"This is strange," he mused, and forthwith turned to the "S's."

He was not long in finding the name of Brunswick Spofford, and found that the gentleman lived in a fashionable portion of Fifth Avenue.

"Here is our man," he cried, with much elation, calling his companion's attention to the name and address in the book.

Hargrave craned his neck and read the name and address:

"Spofford, Brunswick, Broker, — Fifth Avenue. That's our man, and no mistake," he ejaculated, gleefully. "Now, if we do not bring down our game it is our own fault."

"If he doesn't give us the slip."

The young man's countenance fell.

"That is true. Anyway," he suddenly interjected, brightening up, "as we know his address, there will be a chance of watching his movements."

Thad waited for no more discussion, but hurried from the store, which was on Broadway.

At the curb stood a cab. Into this the two men sprang, and Thad gave the driver the address to which they were to be driven.

"This looks a trifle hopeful," he observed, as they rolled away. "My only fear is that, warned by the disaster of his two henchmen, he hasn't jumped the town."

"And taken my money with him!" gasped the young man.

"Yes, and taken your money with him."

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON A HOT SCENT.

As his instructions had been to not spare horseflesh, the driver soon had them at the address given.

The house was one of the stateliest in that part of Fifth Avenue—the upper part, among the swell set—but was closed up as though the family had not returned from the country yet.

"It looks as if we were to meet with our usual luck," suggested Hargrave, despondently.

"Yes, I'm afraid we are not going to meet with much success here. However, if any of the servants are about we may possibly be able to secure the country address."

With that Thad ascended the stoop and rang the bell.

After a long wait a fat, lazy footman came to the door, opened it just wide enough to force his fat face through, and stared silently and stolidly at the two visitors.

"Is Mr. Spofford within?" demanded Thad, peremptorily.

"No, sir," answered the menial, in a wheezy voice.

"Has he not returned from the country yet?"

"No, sir."

"What is his country address?"

The fat menial stared at the questioner for a moment, and then asked:

"Are you the gentleman from the West, sir?"

Thad was thunderstruck.

He had not counted upon this. It was evident that the wily broker had laid his wires well, and it looked as if he (the detective) was to be hemmed on every side.

But a bright thought came to his relief, and he answered in a cheerful tone:

"Well, hardly. I have been outside of New York but half a dozen times in my whole life. Do I look like a Westerner?"

"I dun'no, sir," mumbled the footman, "but my instructions is not to give the master's address to nobody," and the footman was about to close the door, but Thad intercepted him with the command:

"Not in too great a hurry, my man! I must go into this house. I am an officer of the law, and you must not, under the penalty of the law, interfere with my progress."

Which had the effect of determining the fellow to close the door at all hazards, but the visitor was too much for him, and held it ajar until he forced a portion of his body inside; then Hargrave came to his assistance, and they soon forced the door open wide enough to enter.

Succeeding in getting inside, the fat footman started to run, but Thad made a spring for him, caught him by the shoulder and restrained him.

"Not a whimper, no attempt at giving the alarm, or you are a dead man!" was the warning that came.

The fellow's knees smote together under him, and he turned ghastly with terror.

Thad drew his revolver and placing it close to his face, said in a low, terrible voice:

"Now tell me where your master is. I know he is in the house, and if you do not tell me where he is to be found, I'll put a bullet right through that fat head of yours!"

"Oh, don't kill me, mister!" sobbed the frightened fellow, trembling more than ever.

"Tell me where your master is, and you shall not be hurt, otherwise, you are a dead man!"

"Oh! oh! he's not in the house, I tell you, sir!"

"And I know that he is."

Still the fellow persisted in denying that the broker was in the house, and Thad as firmly insisted that he was.

He had calculated upon making as little noise as possible, in order to avoid being heard, but the servant would speak in a very loud voice, owing to his terror, in spite of repeated threats on the part of the detective.

At length Thad lost his patience, and placing the pistol closer to the fellow's head, muttered fiercely:

"Curse you! tell me where I can find your master this instant! I will waste no more time with you!"

"What's the matter down there, James?" came a voice from the top of the stairs.

It was a stern, commanding voice, and when Thad looked up he saw that it was Spofford!

He had no more than uttered the words, when he seemed to realize the truth, and called in an excited tone:

"James! those are burglars! Call the police!"

So saying the gentleman disappeared.

James made a feint to obey his master's order, but Thad hissed in his ear:

"Dare to move toward the door, and I'll brain you!"

Then, turning to his companion, he went on:

"Here, Hargrave, stand guard over this fellow. I have business up-stairs."

The Man from Mexico pulled his pistol and stepped forward, and the detective dashed up the stairs, several steps at a time.

When he reached the floor above, he paused to listen, but there was no sound of any one stirring.

He moved cautiously along the hall, until he came to a door, and, placing his ear to it, listened. But everything was still within.

On the opposite side of the hall was another door, and, stepping across in the same catlike fashion, he listened.

There was the sound of muffled conversation within.

Without more ado he knocked, but no answer followed.

Then he knocked again. After another long interval, a timid woman's voice asked:

"Who is there?"

Thad was in a quandary, but desperate cases justified heroic treatment, and, giving the knob a quick wrench, he opened the door.

A shrill scream rent the air. The only occupants of the room were two women, one a middle-aged, refined-looking lady, and the other a young and pretty one. In short, the identical one he had seen in the cottage in the upper part of the city!

The women were terribly frightened at his unexpected appearance, and clung together for mutual protection.

A single glance about the room showed that there was no one else there, and he felt that he had been guilty of an unwarrantable intrusion.

"I beg a thousand pardons," he faltered. "I did not mean to intrude. The fact is, I thought that Mr. Spofford had come in here."

The latter part of the sentence was added as an afterthought. He had at first only intended to apologize and withdraw, but on second thoughts he concluded to make capital out of the intrusion.

Neither woman made any reply, but he noticed that the older one's brows knit and her eyes flashed angrily.

This had the effect of cooling his sympathy considerably, and he resumed with more firmness:

"Perhaps you can tell me where I may find Colonel Spofford?"

The elder woman released the other and arose majestically to her feet. Her eyes, which he now noticed were exceedingly black and tempestuous, flashed with suppressed fury, and she advanced slightly toward the door.

"How dare you intrude upon a lady's privacy, sir?" she muttered. "If you wish to find Colonel Spofford, why do you not apply to the servants, as a gentleman would do? Leave this room instantly, or I shall call the servants and have you ejected from the house!"

"Madam," began he, in a stern, dignified tone, "it was not my intention to have any words with you. Though an officer of the law in the discharge of my duty, I cannot forget that I am a gentleman, and what is due to a lady; but as you have precipitated matters, I must and shall insist upon knowing the whereabouts of the man for whom I inquired. This I demand, in the name of the law!"

"Then look for him!" snapped the woman, attempting to close the door.

The detective was on the point of preventing it, but upon a little reflection he considered that he was only losing time in parleying with the woman, as in the mean time his man might be making good his escape, so he allowed her to close the door.

There were two more rooms, one on each side of the hall at the front of the building, and, deeming it possible that Spofford might be in one of these, he made his way to the front of the house.

First putting his ear to the door on the left, and, hearing no sound within, he stepped across the hall and applied his ear to the door on that side.

Everything was quiet there, also, but he was not satisfied, and knocked at the door.

The door was but a few feet from the end of the hall, where there was a window looking out upon Fifth Avenue.

The window was raised to admit the air, the opening being covered with a fine wire screen, so that the slightest sounds from the street came in with emphasized distinctness.

Nearly simultaneously with his knock Thad's quick ear caught the sound of a vehicle wheel grinding against the curb.

He knew it could not be that of the cab that had brought him and his friend, for that had driven away while he was awaiting an answer to his ring at the bell.

He stepped to the window and looked down into the street.

And it was fortunate that he did.

A close carriage had drawn up to the curb, and Colonel Spofford was just in the act of entering it.

All thought of obtaining admission to the room vanished, and the detective flew down the stairs like the wind.

Hargrave and the footman still stood in the hall, the young man holding his revolver at an angle with the flunkie's head, and the latter, whose expression of fear had changed to one of disgust, stood with his back flat against the wall.

"What's up?" gasped Hargrave, as the detective came flying down the stairs.

"Come!" was Thad's single ejaculation.

And the next instant he threw the door open and rushed out.

Hargrave, without understanding the cause of the excitement, forsook his charge and hastened after his friend.

But, rapid as had been his flight, before Thad reached the stoop the carriage drove away at a rapid pace.

"Curse the luck!" he ejaculated. "Why did I not keep that cab here?"

"What is it?" inquired the young man, eagerly.

"See yon carriage?" pointing.

"Yes."

"Well, our man is in it."

Barely were the words out of his mouth when an empty cab came rolling by at a leisurely gait.

Instantly Thad was in the middle of the street, made a hasty bargain with the cabby, jumped in, and called his friend.

But he had not to wait a second for Hargrave, for he was at his side almost the instant he was in the cab.

The carriage was still in sight, and the cabby put after it with all the speed his horse could muster.

The course was down-town, and after a scorching dash of five minutes the carriage was seen turning down Forty-second Street in the direction of the Grand Central Depot.

"Ah, that is your game, is it?" muttered the detective.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LOST IN THE SHUFFLE.

Thad pulled his watch from his pocket and took a hasty glance at it as the cab pulled up in front of the depot.

"Ten minutes past seven," he muttered. "There is a west-bound train over the Central at seven-twelve. That is the train the fellow is making for."

In another instant the two men were in the great waiting-room of the grand depot.

Throngs of people swarmed and pushed, going and coming, and amidst it all it was difficult to pick out any particular person.

Nevertheless, Thad's keen eye was not long in singling out his man, who had just purchased a ticket and was making a dash for the gate.

Thad was not a second in finding a depot policeman, showed his badge and asked permission to pass the gate.

And then he dashed through with the speed of the wind.

But when he got inside the gate the crowd was almost as great, with the incoming and out-going passengers, as it had been outside, and his man had become swallowed up in the crush or had already entered a car.

Consulting an attendant, he learned that a train on a certain track was the seven-twelve train, and he lost no time in making his way to it.

It only wanted a minute to the time of starting, so his work had to be done hastily.

But in that time he passed from one end of the train to the other.

But he had had all his trouble for nothing.

The man was not on the train.

Then it occurred to him that there was another west-bound train to go five minutes later, and in an instant he was aboard of this train.

But he had hardly stepped aboard, when, chancing to glance in the direction of the train he had just reconnoitered, which was now moving out, he espied his man in the act of swinging himself upon the step.

Springing back to the platform, Thad ran with all his might in the direction of the retreating train.

But all in vain. Before he reached it the train was out of the depot and fairly under headway.

He stopped, drew a deep sigh of disappointment, and wiped the perspiration from his reeking face.

"Curse the luck!" he muttered. "This fellow must be a mascot as well as a hypnotist."

As he turned he faced Hargrave.

"Hard luck again, eh?" ventured the young man timidly, for he saw that the detective was not in the best of humor.

To his surprise and relief, Thad broke forth into a cheerful laugh.

"Yes," he said, "he has given us the slip again, but he will not escape us. I'll run that man to earth if it takes me the rest of my life."

With that he turned and left the depot.

"Where now?" inquired his friend.

"Back to his house. I must find out this man's destination, and there is the only place to get it."

During all his long career as a detective Thad Burr had rarely been so thoroughly worked up and excited as he was over this affair.

He was what few people had ever seen him, actually nervous.

He hurried along at so rapid a pace that

his companion was obliged to almost run to keep alongside of him until he arrived at the corner of Fourth Avenue, where several cabs were standing.

"Here, cabby!" he called to one of them, who seemed to have the best piece of horseflesh, at the same time springing into the vehicle, "drive me to — Fifth Avenue as quickly as that old plug-ugly of yours will carry you."

At the same time he handed the driver what was equal to four fares.

"Yis, sor."

And a second later the cab was dashing up the avenue at a furious spurt.

In far less time than it had taken them to come down the two men were back at the Fifth Avenue mansion.

It was quite dark by this time, and yet no lights were visible in the house.

Thad mounted the stoop and rang the bell.

A full minute elapsed, and still there was no response.

"We are going to have trouble this trip," he muttered, in a low voice to his companion. "Those people are going to profit by the lesson they got this evening."

With that he gave another long, steady push on the electric button.

At the same instant he became aware that some one was ascending the stoop behind him.

Turning hastily to see who it was, he discovered to be a messenger boy.

The boy held an envelope in his hand, and came leisurely up the steps.

Quicker than thought Thad had surmised the nature of the message and devised a plot at the same instant.

"Message for Mr. Spofford?" questioned Thad holding out his hand for the envelope.

The boy hesitated and drew back, at the same time muttering:

"No, it ain't for no Spofford, it's for—"

"Ah, I see," interposed the detective, "it's for Baldwin."

"Mrs. Baldwin, ye mean," corrected the boy, with a grin.

"Well, it's all in the family. Give me the message."

Still the boy held off suspiciously, eyed the detective doubtfully, and asked:

"I was to give it to Mrs. Baldwin herself or the footman."

"What difference does it make, young man?" demanded the detective, severely. "As for Mrs. Baldwin, she is out, and if you want to wait for that footman, you had better fetch your supper and bed and take it easy. Mrs. Baldwin is my sister, and I will take the message and give it to her. Did he hand it to you at the depot?"

This last question did more to reassure the boy than all else Thad had said, for the lad could not conceive how he should have known about the master of the house being at the depot unless he belonged in the house, so he cheerfully handed over the message with the timid request:

"Be shure to give it to 'er, sir."

"Oh, certainly."

The boy tipped, he sprang down the stoop at a couple of strides, but when he reached the middle of the sidewalk he stopped and looked back.

It was evident he had begun to doubt whether he had done the right thing, for his face took on an expression of anxiety.

He evidently could not conceive, for one thing, why the two men, if they belonged in the house, should remain standing so long on the step, and for another, why one of them should tear open and read a message which was intended for his sister.

And then, he saw, a moment later, these same men descend from the stoop and walk away.

So much disturbed was he over the affair, in fact, that as the two men passed him he stepped up to Thad and demanded, with a good deal of boldness:

"Say, mister, I thought you was a-go-in' ter give that message ter d'e lady?"

"Thats all right, my boy," replied the detective, good naturedly. "I'll give it to her all in good time."

"But I'm responsible," persisted the lad, "an' if she don't git it I'm liable to lose my place."

"Oh, well, my boy, if you are anyways anxious on the subject perhaps you had better give it to her yourself."

And he returned the envelope to the lad.

He surveyed the torn envelope with a frown and muttered:

"Yer hadn't no business ter open it."

"Oh, well, if you'r afraid of getting into trouble about it," said Thad, snatching the envelope again, "just tell them that a detective took it away from you."

With that he exhibited his badge, and the boy, with a frightened look, hastened away.

"It would have been a mistake, I realized afterward; to have allowed the woman to receive the message," observed Thad, as he and his friend made their way in the direction of Broadway. "The moment she learned that the message had been opened and read she would have jumped at the conclusion that it was the work of a detective and telegraphed her husband to be on the alert. As it now stands, I have the case in my own hands."

"You intend to follow him, eh?"

"Certainly. Let me see; he took the seven-twelve train. That will bring him into Detroit somewhere about five o'clock to-morrow afternoon, if his train is on time. There is another train at nine, which is a faster one, and gets in about seven-something, I remember. It is now five minutes to eight," he pursued, looking at his watch. "We must get that train."

"We have plenty of time," suggested the Man from Mexico.

"Or would have if we did not have to go home. I must run 'round and get a few articles which may be needed on the trip—some money, among other things."

"Well, here is our car."

They jumped upon a Broadway cable car, which soon brought them to Thirty-fourth Street, where they alighted.

"We'll take a cab here," said Thad, "and we can have it to fetch us back to the depot."

Jumping into the cab, they were soon at the detective's house, where he made a few hasty preparations, snatched up such articles of clothing, disguise and the like, as he thought he might need on his trip, put an extra roll of money into his pocket, and was off.

At a few minutes before train time the two men arrived at the depot, bought tickets and took their seats in the sleeper.

"What do you think of the situation now?" questioned Hargrave, when they were comfortably seated in the car.

"In what respect?" asked Thad.

"With regard as to who Baldwin is."

"My impression, from the latest developments, is that Baldwin is one of our man Spofford's numerous aliases."

"But is it not strange that he should have one name in the directory and address his correspondence to his family in the other?"

"That is a puzzling point. Besides, as you probably remember, when I asked the footman if Mr. Spofford was in, he recognized the name?"

"Yes, and so did the woman whom you found in the room."

"There is some mystery about it, I confess, but we shall soon unravel it. At present the only theory that I can think of is that he does business under one name and is known to his family by another—no, that won't do. They apparently know him under both names."

"But, admitting this theory, what about the name in the book which Madden gave me?"

"I hardly know what to think of that. Possibly Madden wrote the name in there in the hope that if the book should chance to fall into the hands of the police it would throw the suspicion on Spofford or Baldwin, instead of himself. Altogether, it is a mixed piece of business."

"Then there is the girl whom we saw in the cottage—"

"Oh, yes; I forgot to tell you," broke in

Thad. "The young lady in question was one of the two women I found in the room."

"You don't tell me!"

"Fact. And my theory with regard to her is that she is the broker's daughter, and the other woman his wife and her mother."

"I wonder what she was doing at the cottage that day?"

"As I suggested at the time, this man may maintain the two establishments, the better to carry on his crooked business."

A silence of some minutes ensued, and the young man spoke again:

"It didn't appear that the broker had the money with him."

"No, he couldn't have had it. He has probably concealed it somewhere in the city, intending to either have it sent to him or to return as soon as the excitement of this affair blows over."

"And little Gamm?"

"Oh, I suppose he will either keep himself dark in the city or go off somewhere to rusticate until he considers it safe to come back."

"It would be funny if we should find them both out here together."

"It would, indeed. Let me see, the message says that he will stop at the Russell House. I know very well where that is."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"BOSOM FRIENDS."

On the day following the colloquy between the detective and the Man from Mexico, recorded in the foregoing chapter, at a few minutes after five in the afternoon, two men alighted from a train from the East which had run into the Union Depot at Detroit, Michigan.

One of them was a large, portly man, of commanding presence and lordly air, and the other a much smaller man, of a rather nervous, frisky habit.

They both had the appearance of well-to-do men, were well dressed and adorned with a profusion of jewelry and gold watch-chains, which attested their opulence.

The larger man appeared to treat the smaller one with a sort of forbearing patronage, as though he might have been a dependent, while the smaller one seemed to look upon his huge companion in the light of a very great man.

Strange to say, opulent appearing as they were, they seemed to prefer carrying their own baggage to trusting it to the usual agents of transportation, and as they left the depot they were seen bearing between them a small valise, which, from its size, would not appear to be load enough for one man.

And yet they carried it as though it might have been quite load enough for both of them.

Stepping from the depot into the street, they took passage in a Jefferson Avenue horse-car, which carried them to the corner of Woodward Avenue, where they transferred to a Woodward Avenue car, and this, in turn, carried them in front of their destination, the Russell House, which faces the Campus Martius.

The strangers were at once shown to the best suite of rooms in the house, which looked out upon the beautiful square from two sides.

The two gentlemen then divested themselves of their traveling apparel, substituted more becoming suits for the occasion, and prepared themselves for dinner, which was served a short time afterward.

When the dinner had been despatched the gentlemen returned to their apartments, threw on their elegant but easy dressing-gowns, lighted each a fine Havana cigar, and threw themselves indolently down on separate divans, which stood diagonally to each other and from which they commanded a view of the square, with its monuments, trees and fountains, and proceeded to take life easy.

"Well, Gamm, my boy," began the large man, blowing a long whiff of fragrant smoke from his lips, "this is not so bad."

"Rather comfortable, colonel, I should

say," returned the little man, with a gleeful chuckle.

"Might be a blessed sight worse, eh, my boy?"

"Yes, indeed, colonel."

"But I wonder what the boys will say."

The little man went off in a hysterical chuckle that threatened to terminate with the stoppage of his breath.

"Heavens!" he ejaculated, "but won't they swear?"

"I fear they will," responded the big man, with a dry laugh. "Bad habit the boys have got into—very bad. But if they must swear, and require a provocation, why, bless my soul, they've got it."

"So they have—so they have, colonel," chuckled the little man.

A silence of some duration followed, during which the two men puffed at their cigars with seeming great satisfaction, and watched the whirl of carriages and other equipages as it swayed along the broad avenue and across the square.

At length Gamm broke the silence by asking, in a timid voice:

"What are the plans for the future, colonel?"

"Plans for the future?" said the colonel, starting as from a deep reverie. "What do you mean?"

"Well, what do you propose to do—remain here, or move on?"

"Oh, I shall probably remain here for a few days, and then if matters in New York are reported favorable I may go back; if not, I may go further West, or, possibly, take a run over into Canada. If these detectives get too close, the latter will be an excellent plan. It is handy here, you know—just across the river—be over there in ten minutes. Her Gracious Majesty makes a specialty of protecting such worthy gentlemen as you and I, my boy."

This was the signal for a hearty outburst on the part of both men, and when it subsided little Gamm thought it would be a good time to broach another subject—while his big partner was in a good humor—a subject which he had been trying all the way from New York to command sufficient courage to broach.

"Colonel," he began, and his voice trembled a good deal, "you and I have worked together quite a good while, haven't we?"

"Oh, yes," answered the other, indifferently, "rather a good while. Why?"

"We have always got along pretty well, haven't we?"

"Oh, bless my soul," laughed the colonel, "I always get along with everybody. I simply give people to understand what I want, they soon learn that they've got to do it—and we get along. You have always done just as I told you—and we got along."

"That is true, colonel," murmured the other, humbly. "That was because I recognized, as everybody must, your superior intelligence. I recognized your superior intellectuality the first time we met, and I felt that it was not only my duty, but my privilege to bow to it. But, notwithstanding the disparity of our mental spheres, colonel, we have been friends, have we not? That is—"

At that moment the great man turned upon the cringing little man with an amused smile.

Then he broke out in a dry cackle.

"What do you mean?" he at length asked, in an indulgent tone.

"I mean that we have been friends—that is—"

"Do you mean as man and man?" roared the colonel. "If that is what you mean—no! If you mean as man and dog—yes!"

The big man arose and walked the floor for a minute or two and his usually placid spirit seemed to be ruffled to a greater extent than his partner had ever witnessed.

Meanwhile, little Gamm sat, crushed and humbled into the dirt, his eyes on the carpet, his thin little hands, palms together, between his knees, and his pointed little shoulders drawn up, and altogether he was a most pitiful object.

At length the little man grew so bold that he actually broached another subject, which, however, had been the main subject toward which he was tending when he

ventured upon the disastrous topic of mutual friendship.

He said, in a bolder tone than the colonel had ever heard him aspire to:

"We were fortunate, colonel, to get the whole of the wealth, were we not?"

"Yes, rather so," answered the other, carelessly.

"I think I may claim a small share of the credit for that transaction, may I not?"

"You may, my boy," cried the big man, in a whole-souled outburst. "With the assistance of my superior intellectuality, you did very well, sir."

Gamm smiled a sickly little smile, and at length ventured again:

"There is a pretty good sum of it, isn't there, colonel?"

"Oh, yes—a million or more, I should say."

Another silence, during which the little man breathed hard, smiled timidly, rubbed his hands, and finally simpered in a weaker voice than usual:

"How—how—do you propose to divide it, colonel, if I may be so audacious as to ask?"

The big man indulged in a great big hearty laugh.

"Divide it?" he roared. "Why, there is no dividing to be done that I am aware of."

"You don't mean that—that—we are to remain—"

"What?" bellowed the big man, jumping to his feet.

"Nothing. Only I didn't know but you might want—want—to—give me my share, so that you wouldn't have so much to carry."

It had been an awful effort, and the little man looked somewhat relieved when he finally succeeded in getting it out.

Again the colonel roared with laughter.

At length he stood over the little man with his legs spread very wide apart, looked down upon him with a smile of pitying contempt, and said in a witheringly patronizing tone:

"Your share? Why, what do you consider your share, you miserable little creature?"

Gamm did not dare to lift his eyes from the carpet, and did not speak.

"Your share?" repeated the big man. "You amuse me. Why, if I give you the price of a meal's victuals you should be satisfied."

The little man groaned, but still did not speak.

A tear stole out of each of his bleary little eyes, and trickled down his swarthy cheeks.

The big man took another turn or two about the room, and again paused in front of Gamm.

"Well, there, you poor little beggar," he said, "don't take it to heart to such an extent. I'll act the generous part by you. I shall give you out of the treasure we have brought the magnificent sum of one thousand dollars. There, what do you think of that for generosity?"

Gamm looked up with a pitiful smile of gratitude, and simpered:

"Oh, you are very good, sir. Only for your extreme generosity and superior intellectuality I should probably have got nothing."

Spofford apparently did not see the sarcasm concealed beneath this compliment, if indeed sarcasm was intended. He took it in good part, as he did all flattery, smiled and answered:

"I'm delighted to witness this show of appreciation and gratitude, my boy. It shows that you are not yet completely lost to grace."

Then, taking up his hat and striding toward the door, he remarked:

"Stay here, Gamm. I'm going out for a little turn about the town. Be back in an hour or so."

If any one could have been looking from some unseen view point and seen the sudden and radical transformation in the little man, feature and form, the instant the door closed upon his partner, the on-looker would have imagined he was witnessing another example of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

The weak, fawning expression of his

face had given place to one of fiendish malignance, the thin lips were drawn tight across his mouth, the black little eyes glistened with the venom of a serpent's, and the whole aspect was that of some craven beast driven to bay.

He had risen from his seat, and stood glaring toward the door through which the big man had passed, in a half-crouching attitude, like a cat about to leap upon its prey.

"Give me a thousand dollars, will he?" he muttered at last, clinching his fists. "A pitiful thousand dollars out of all that immense accumulation, which I more than any other man have labored to collect, risking my freedom and very life. A pitiful thousand dollars! And then to refuse my friendship, after all I have done for him. Fiend! But it served me right. I should have been a man. He tells the truth when he says that I should only be his friend as the dog is the friend of its master. Pitiful creature that I have been! Pouring out volumes of fulsome flattery upon the beast when I knew that not one word of it was true, and which sickened even my poor craven soul to indulge in."

Suddenly he became erect, and his features took on a hard, defiant look.

He paced the floor like a caged animal.

"I have it," he suddenly exclaimed, stopping short in his walk. "I'll be his slave no longer. I'll defy him. I'll do him a trick that will make him cry like a child, with all his pompous manliness."

With that he threw himself into a chair by the side of a table, whereon were pen, ink and paper, snatched up a pen, pulled a writing pad in front of him, and began to write with great rapidity.

For ten minutes or more there was no sound in the room except the rapid scratch, scratch of his pen.

At length he jumped up.

"There," he muttered. "I think that will furnish cheerful reading for him. Now for my object."

He hastily clapped his hat upon his head, flew across the room to a closet in which had been deposited the valise, and grasped the handle.

It caused the blood to rush to his face to lift it, but it seemed that he had been endowed with superhuman strength, for the next instant he lifted the bag, which had been load enough for him and his big partner, from the closet, and walked to the door with it.

He paled a little as he opened the door, and evidently suffered a slight flutter of apprehension, but the determination born of desperation nerved him to the effort, and he lugged the great load to the elevator, rang the bell, and was soon downstairs and out of the hotel.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SURPRISE AND DEFEAT.

The colonel's walk did not last as long as he had intimated that it would, so that he was back to the hotel in a trifle over three-quarters of an hour from the time he started.

He strode leisurely into the room with his customary measured, emphatic tread, humming a simple little air in his sweetest voice.

He appeared not to notice the absence of his partner at first, and walked over to one side of the room in a leisurely manner and hung up his natty fall overcoat and glossy silk hat.

Then he walked to the center of the room in a careless fashion, and for the first time saw that Gamm was not there.

He cast, first, a careless glance about the room, and then a somewhat impatient one, and finally an anxious one.

"This is odd," he muttered. "I wonder where the little beggar has gone? Confound his impudence! I wonder that he had the audacity to leave the room without my consent. However, perhaps—"

But at this point his face grew a trifle anxious, and he ran over to the closet with rather more agility than was common to him.

He threw open the door and peered into the closet, which had grown somewhat dusky within, and not appearing to see

what he sought, stooped over and groped inside with his hand.

The next instant he straightened up with a vigorous spring, and stared almost stupidly about the room.

And then he walked back to the table with a slow, measured tread, and stood before it for a moment, thinking, wondering, but uttering no word.

There he stood in the gathering gloom for a long time, his eyes fixed on the table and one hand resting on it.

Suddenly his eyes fell upon the writing pad, which he could not help remarking, from the position of the still open inkstand, had been recently used.

He snatched up the pad and attempted to read what was written on it, but the light had too far faded by this time to permit of such a thing, and he walked to the window.

Here he managed to decipher the valedictory of his late partner, although it took him a long time to work his way through it.

At the conclusion the pad dropped from his nervous fingers and he grasped the side of the window for support.

His senses seemed to have suddenly left him. The room swam before his eyes and he clapped his hand to his forehead in the vain effort to collect his thoughts.

For a long time he thus stood, wondering, in a dazed sort of way, whether he was waking or dreaming.

At length he uttered a low, pitiful moan. "God!"

Then he opened his eyes and stared wildly about the room.

He started to walk, and staggered.

But he nerved himself with all his stubborn determination, and zigzagged across the room to the closet again.

Again he peered in, and then got down upon his hands and knees and groped about with his hand.

At length he arose, slowly, reluctantly, it appeared, and staggered to the window again.

Here for a long time he stood gazing out at the flickering lights in the street and the dark forms flitting past, without seeing either.

He saw only with his spiritual eyes, and they beheld but two objects—little Gamm and the bag of wealth.

But he was calm—alarmingly calm.

He did not so much as tremble, nor did a muscle of his face twitch, only his great, gladiator-like breast heaved, and he gave vent to an occasional sigh.

Suddenly all this changed.

He straightened up, his face took on a stern expression, and his muscles seemed to have grown as hard as cords of steel.

He stole cat-like half across the room, and stopped.

He cast his eyes furtively from side to side like some great hungry lion.

His hands were firmly clutched, and his ponderous jaws were set.

"Curse! curse! curse!" he hissed. "To think that the miserable little cur should have possessed the courage! Fiends and furies! Oh, that he were here at this minute! I should tear him to atoms!"

Then he paced the floor for a spell.

Again he went to the window and looked out.

Nothing afforded him relief.

"A thousand curses on the pitiful villain!" he muttered. "To imagine that the cringing, fawning, cowardly little imp, that hadn't the spirit of a mouse—that hadn't the courage to look me in the face or claim what rightfully belonged to him, should have the temerity to rob me in this manner! Still, it is the action of a coward. Nevertheless, as he says in his letter, he has repaid me, richly repaid me, for all my tyranny over him. I deserve it, and should not complain if it had been perpetrated by a man. But that creature!"

And the gentleman's features assumed an expression of utter disgust.

For a long time he again stood in moody silence.

Suddenly he moved with a start.

"I have it," he ejaculated. "The people of the hotel must have seen him depart. He wouldn't have dared to have left without saying something to somebody. The

elevator boy will certainly know whether he has gone or not. Confound it!" he suddenly broke off. "What do I want to inquire whether he has gone or not? I know that already. What I want to know is, where he has gone. Possibly the clerk can throw some light upon the subject. What is it I want to know? Oh, yes—where—where—deuce take it! he tells me in his letter, and that is as truthful as anything he would tell the clerk would be. Oh, my God! I shall go crazy! Indeed, I am nearly so already."

Here the half-frantic man sank upon one of the divans, buried his face in his hands and moaned aloud.

Thus he sat for some moments, and then, with the nervous start that had characterized his actions for the last several minutes, he sprang to his feet.

"This will never do," he muttered. "I must stir, move, be on the go. That fellow must be found, and, by the eternal heavens! I'll find him if I have to follow him to the end of the earth! Yes, I swear it! I shall follow him to the end of the earth, and when I find him, I'll kill him like the dog that he is! I'll follow him, follow—"

"No, I think not, my friend. Your days of following have come to an end."

The door had suddenly opened, and two men had strode in.

One of them was Detective Burr and the other his friend, the Man from Mexico.

"You hardly expected New York friends to visit you to-night, did you, colonel," laughed Thad. "But they will drop in on a fellow when he is least expecting them."

Spofford muttered a terrible oath, clapped his hand instinctively upon his hip-pocket—which was empty—and then glanced significantly in the direction of his overcoat, on the opposite wall, where his pistol was.

But Thad was between him and the coat, and moreover, he was now under the shadow of the detective's pistol, which he had drawn at the instant the big man put his hand back to his hip-pocket.

Thad drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and walked toward the ex-broker.

The latter, who appeared to have grown calm by this time, stood motionless, staring at the detective with the outstretched bracelets, and appeared in no mood to resist arrest.

Thad was within two feet of him, and another step would have brought him to the big man, when the latter suddenly turned as though he had been moved by some invisible spring, and darted across the room.

There was a window looking out upon a side street—the front of the hotel being octagonal—and to this he ran.

The action was so sudden and unexpected that Thad was taken completely off his guard, and before he could recover his presence of mind sufficiently to run to the man, he had thrown up the window and begun to climb out.

A fire-escape balcony ran along this side of the house, and it had evidently been the intention of the colonel to climb upon the balcony, dart along until he came to what he hoped he would come to, an open window, by which he could escape.

He had succeeded in getting his bulky form half-way out of the window by the time Thad reached him, and was bustling with all the energy he possessed.

The detective made a grab for him and caught him by the sleeve just as the arm was vanishing.

But the big man was determined not to be detained, and gave a heroic surge and tore himself away from the detective's grasp.

The effort brought him to his feet, outside of the window, and on the narrow balcony, but such was the momentum he had given himself in the surge that he lost his balance and staggered against the railing of the balcony.

Then his tremendous weight caused his feet to slip on the smooth iron bars forming the floor of the balcony, and he toppled over the railing.

Down, down, he went, whirling, hurtling through the air like some great, unwieldy animal! Down, down to the flags below!

"My God!" gasped Thad, as he peered over the balcony at the mass of motionless flesh upon the sidewalk below, "the man has killed himself!"

And his prediction was correct.

A crowd soon collected about the prostrate man, and finally a policeman put in an appearance.

After examining the man for some moments, and clubbing the crowd back, by way of showing his authority, he walked leisurely to the nearest call-box and sent in an ambulance call.

When the ambulance arrived, the surgeon examined the man and pronounced him dead.

Meanwhile, more police had arrived on the scene, looked over the ground, and then went up-stairs into the room from which the man had fallen.

Thad and his friend had gone down, but as soon as the body had been removed to the hospital they returned to the room, only to find it in the possession of the police.

The captain was there, and insisted upon placing the two men under arrest.

Thad showed his badge of authority, and his warrant for the dead man's arrest, and finally detailed the account of the way the man had come by his death.

But all this did not suffice, and he and Hargrave were dragged off to the police station.

Fortunately it was the central station, and the chief of police was in at the time.

As soon as Thad had shown him his credentials, the chief grasped him by the hand, and exclaimed:

"Well, by George! this is the real Thad Burr, is it?"

"That's what they call me down on Manhattan," replied the detective, modestly.

"Well, I'm blamed glad to meet you, Mr. Burr. I've heard so much of your exploits that I had almost come to the conclusion that you were a mythical detective, like Sherlock Holmes. How is old Tom?"

And so he ran on, asking questions faster than Thad could answer them, and finally asked:

"How long are you going to stop with us, Mr. Burr?"

"I must leave at once," replied Thad.

"Why, what is your hurry? Your man is in the grips."

"One of them only. There is another one which I must look up."

CHAPTER XXX.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

The chief of police insisted upon taking Thad out home with him for the night—he had a beautiful residence up Woodward Avenue—but the detective begged off on the plea that he had a good deal to do before resuming his journey.

When he got back to the hotel he found that the police had rummaged the room thoroughly, turning the few articles in it upside down in the forlorn hope of running upon a clew of the broker's death, and then locked it up, took the key to the clerk and ordered him to allow no one to enter the room without instructions from them.

This necessitated another visit to the police headquarters, and, as the chief had gone home for the night, a visit to his house, two miles out.

The chief was delighted to see him again, and when Thad had explained matters, gave him a written order to enter the room.

It was not far from midnight, therefore, when he got back to the hotel, but with his order he obtained the key and made his way to the room at once.

Thad lighted the gas and took a survey of the apartment.

Almost the first thing that fell under his eye was the writing pad, which still lay on the floor where Spofford had dropped it, and he picked it up.

Glancing at the bottom of the page the first thing he saw was the signature, which was that of Solomon Gamm.

Then at the top of the sheet he saw that it was addressed to Gerald Baldwin.

And seating himself on one of the divans, and saying to his companion,

"Here is something interesting," he proceeded to peruse the letter, which ran as follows:

"To Gerald Baldwin, Thief, Scoundrel, Hypocrite:

"You old hyena! you will doubtless be surprised when you receive this. You would not have credited me with so much courage and daring. I, whom you are in the habit of browbeating, of belittling, of comparing to a dog! I, whom you have abused and cheated, and morally spat upon all these years, and saw me accept my fate with cringing humility, you would not have imagined for a moment could pluck up courage enough to do what I am about to perpetrate.

"When you read this, you imp of Hades, you villain of villains, you curse of the earth—Oh, that I could find words to describe the fiend and demon that you are! As I said, when you read this, I will be far away—so far that you will never overtake me. As you very truthfully observed an hour ago, it is but ten minutes between here and Her Majesty's dominion, and there I shall be long ere you read this. But I shall not stop there, nor will I stop anywhere where you will be able to seek me out.

"As you will discover, I have taken the treasure along with me. You would give me a thousand dollars! A miserable, petty thousand. Very well, I will now turn the tables on you, and give you not one penny to bless yourself with. If you ever return to New York—without the darbies on your accursed wrists—give my love to the boys. But I hope and pray that when you do go back it will be with the prospect of a life sojourn at Sing Sing.

"Farewell, you thief of the universe, you hyena, you impious dreg of infamy! Farewell, and may your last day be your worse. Yours, in vitriolic hate.

"SOLOMON GAMM."

"Well, by Jove!" ejaculated Hargrave, "of all the venom that takes the bun."

"It is a trifle bitter," laughed the detective, "but not a whit too bad for the person to whom it is addressed."

"Not a whit. He deserved all he could get in that line, but it was a case of dog eat dog, I guess."

"No question about that. By the way, this appears to settle the matter of the name."

"Yes, I guess his real name was Baldwin. A man in the heat of passion like that would not be likely to resort to pet or fictitious names."

"Well, our work is not nearly at an end yet, my boy," observed the detective. "That little wretch Gamm is to be hunted down yet."

"Yes, and the treasure."

"And the treasure. And the worst of it is, we are as much at sea as we were a week ago. This is a baffling case."

"Which direction will you break for from here?"

"That is impossible to say, at present. I must look about here a bit first and see whether I cannot run upon a clew as to the direction our man has gone."

Thad reflected a few moments, and then suddenly observed:

"By Jove! we had better stir at once—to-night! We shall probably find the same men on at the different depots now that were on when the fellow departed. The same thing at the ferries, and the circumstance being fresh in their minds, it will be easier to gain a clew at once than later."

Accordingly, the two men left the hotel and visited the three or four railway depots of the city, but failed to get any trace of the fugitive.

"Well, let us try the ferries," suggested Thad.

This was a simple matter. All the ferries landed at the same dock—at the foot of Woodward Avenue.

But, although the same watchmen had been on duty since six o'clock, none of them had noticed any one suiting the description of the little broker.

The following morning Thad made another reconnoiter of the town with a

view of striking the trail, but with the same result; so, discouraged at last, he and his companion took the train for New York at noon, arriving in the city the following day a little after ten.

Greatly fatigued from his long siege and extensive trip, he made no further effort until the middle of the afternoon, when he and Hargrave went down to Wall Street.

Through an unavoidable delay it was a few minutes after three when they reached the office of the late brokers, and, as they expected, the office was closed.

Thad and his friend strolled aimlessly across to the opposite side of the street and stood for a short time within the shadow of the doorway of one of the great financial concerns.

"I wonder if the brokerage business over there will still be continued, after what has occurred?" mused Thad.

"I cannot see how it can," said Hargrave. "They will probably use the death of old Spofford as an excuse for closing up."

"Which leads me to believe there are others connected with the concern. I suppose they must have heard of his death by this time. I wonder there is not a death notice on the door. Did you observe whether there was or not?"

"No. I wonder if there is? Suppose we step across again and see, just for curiosity."

The men crossed the street again, but there was no death notice on the door.

They were just turning away, when, to their surprise, the door opened and old Isaac Blottstein emerged.

The old Shylock was evidently deeply absorbed in thought, for he stood for a moment, holding the door slightly ajar, absently gazing at the ground, as if pondering over some profound matter, or discussing in his own mind whether he would go back into the office for something or wait until another time.

This hesitation was capital for the detective. His own mind was made up instantly; he sprang at the door, hurled the old man aside, and entered.

Hargrave had presence of mind enough to follow, and within a few seconds from the time the son of Israel had opened the door, both were inside and the door closed on the old man.

To all appearance the place was deserted. The clerks were gone, and there was no sound of life therein.

Thad did not speak, but putting his finger across his lips as an injunction to silence, pointed significantly in the direction of the door leading to the private office in the rear.

Tiptoeing along the corridor, the two men reached the door, Thad in advance.

He listened at the door, and could hear a soft shuffling of feet upon the carpet within, mingled with a queer, subdued purring noise, resembling that made by a cat while gnawing a bone. Then came the scarcely audible words:

"All mine! All mine! He would have given me a thousand dollars—a miserly thousand, but now it is all mine! No wonder he committed suicide! It seems that Providence was with me that time."

Then followed a low, gloating chuckle.

"All mine! All mine!" came the words again. "A whole million! The accumulation of the gang for years. Beautiful, glittering gems, precious, shining metals—Oh! how I love you! Let me kiss you—touch you to my lips—"

Thad pushed the door open.

There, alone, standing before an open safe, with the casket in his arms and a string of diamonds which he had taken from it pressed to his lips, was Solomon Gamm.

As soon as he espied the detective, the little man thrust the string of diamonds back into the casket closed the lid, and made a hasty attempt to reach the safe with it, but the alert detective was too quick for him, and, leaping forward, he clutched the casket, saying, quietly:

"Never mind putting that in the safe, my friend; I'll take charge of it."

The little man was too much overwhelmed with fright to offer any resist-

ance, or even to speak, and, uttering a whimper, extended the casket.

Meanwhile Hargrave had followed Thad into the room, and now stood directly behind him.

He had seen his eyes fixed upon the face of the little broker from the moment of entering the room, and appeared to be trying to make out where he had seen that face before. Suddenly he snatched the wig from the broker's head, and, after another brief survey of the features, exclaimed:

"Now I have it! Yes, by George, there cannot be a doubt of it! Billy Ferguson, how are you? Given up the saloon business in Mexico, I perceive."

But the latter part of the harangue was lost on the little man.

The strain had been too much for his nerves and he had fallen in a swoon.

After a night in the Tombs, Gamm sent for the detective, and made a full confession, also divulging the names of the other members of the gang, including the old Shylock, and their hiding places. But, contrary to Thad's expectations, no men of good standing in society were named.

Spofford alone had been looked upon as a respectable, honorable gentleman, and his henchmen were all a class of depraved wretches, of which Gamm (who, by the way, was the dearest of the lot), Madden and Sheery were fair specimens.

Spofford's family were of the highest respectability and understood very little about the nature of his business. They knew he was a "broker," and had been taught that the business involved a good deal of mystery and chicanery, but they never dreamed of his dishonesty, nor believed that there was anything wrong in the fact of his using two names.

He had also hoodwinked his wife and beautiful daughter in the matter of the two places of residence, to which they had been compelled to dodge alternately, with the explanation that "a successful business man always has enemies." His real name was Baldwin.

In due time, the balance of the gang, including the old Jew, were tried and convicted.

"It has been a tough job, but you have won," the Man from Mexico observed, when it was all over. "How much of the wealth shall I take?"

"What do you mean?" queried Thad, in surprise.

"By right, it all belongs to you. But I would like a little to carry me along until I can get into something."

"You talk like a crazy man," averred Thad. "I have done nothing outside of my duty. Pay me a reasonable sum for my services and I am satisfied. You are a young man, with your life before you, and have much greater need of the money than I, who am comfortable already."

Nevertheless, the well-satisfied young man would insist upon bestowing a princely reward upon the detective, which, he claimed, was less a reward than a token of friendship.

The rest of the treasure found in the casket was turned over to the police department to find the rightful owners.

It will not do to close this history without mentioning the fact that Hargrave, having made the acquaintance of the Baldwin family, and having discovered, not only that the father had left them next to penniless, but that Estelle was a most charming young person, his sympathy was enlisted toward them, and in due time he and the young woman became extremely warm friends and were ultimately married.

THE END.

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